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Kashmir Problem :

A Striking Expose of the Fragile Political Base & Tyrannical Face of the Indian State

The way Kashmir got transformed so quickly into a seething cauldron of anger and revolt against the Indian regime is a telling commentary on the volatile political situation prevailing in India. The situation is more so in those parts of the country where the general imperialist-feudal oppression acquires an added dimension of a slight towards a national or a tribal identity. The Kashmir problem no doubt has its own complexities, historical as well as geo-political; nevertheless, it happens to highlight, in the most clear-cut fashion, the general reality of the Indian autocratic rulers' cynical disregard of the lives and concerns of the broad masses of Indian people, the general reality of their crucially depleted political capital and enhanced administrative ferocity vis-a-vis the common people, and the general reality of the anti-people, anti-national content of their fundamental slogan "unity and integrity of India (ie, Indian State) at all costs".

A national problem :

These days all the prominent ruling class politicians and other spokesmen can be heard frequently saying that the Kashmir problem is a "national problem". Any person, who is somewhat familiar with their political jargon, will make no mistake about the meaning of that phrase. The phrase is farthest from acknowledging the truth that the Kashmir problem involves the national factor — the issue of national status, rights, feelings and aspirations of the Kashmiri people. What they mean is that the problem is such as bears upon the interests of the ruling classes as a whole and their State rather than the interests of a particular section or political party of the ruling classes. Hence the implied suggestion that all of them should forgo

specific case, their "democratic right" of equal leg-pulling and, instead, bring to bear their concerted power against the incipient threat to their common authority. And, that threat, all of them certainly understand, is being posed neither by Pakistan (or any other "foreign hand" bent upon dismembering India) or by the sundry Islamic fundamentalist armed groups active in Kashmir but by the defiant Kashmiri people. The systematic calumny, persecution, humiliation, repression and mowing down of Kashmiri people do not take place as a result of some administrative bungling or stray excesses of some police force but as expressions of the considered response of the Indian rulers to the Kashmir problem, on the basis of their threat-perception.

Beat-them-into-submission policy :

The present State-terrorist policy of all-out offensive against the masses of Kashmiri people is the culmination of the long-standing State-policy of breaking the resistance of the Kashmiri people to the gradual annexation of Kashmir to the Indian Union through political perfidy, manipulation and repression of mass protest. As early as in 1953, the Indian State's Kashmir policy had revealed its annexationist thrust and essentially coercive nature when the first and last properly-elected ruler of Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah, was dismissed and arrested on orders from the Nehru government, and more than 1,500 Kashmiris were butchered to quell the widespread mass protest against that high-handed action.

In the past, however, the Indian rulers could always utilise some native political agency for imposing their political will on the course of events in Kashmir and, thus, maintain a facade of an indigenous leadership being at the help of Kashmir affairs. Even the dismissal and detention of Sheikh Abdullah was effected under the formal authority of the then "sadar-e-ryasat" Karan Singh. While the "lion of Kashmir" was forcibly kept out of action for almost two decades, till he was tamed

and re-instated in 1975, the show of a Kashmiri government was kept on through front-men such as Bakshi Gulam Mohammed and G.M.Sadique.

From the mid-eighties onwards, even the worn-out political buffer that the National Conference provided as the ruling party has been subjected to a dismantling operation. As a result, the National Conference today stands disgraced with the Kashmiri public and politically sidelined by Central intervention and, in the meanwhile, no other Kashmiri political platform has been allowed to come up as an alternative parliamentary political force. The Indian rulers' annexationist Kashmir policy has come full circle. Recently, they have dropped the pretence of respecting the special status of Kashmir and sought to lord it over Kashmir like with any other state of the Indian Union (notwithstanding their ritualistic reiteration of article 370 which has systematically been drained of all political content and retains only the legal safeguard against the buying up of Kashmiri landed property by non-Kashmiris). Thus the Indian rulers have confronted the Kashmiri people with the choice of either getting resigned to unqualified subjection to the Indian State or revolting against the encroaching-authority of the Indian State. The Kashmiri people have opted for the latter course.

The mass character of the defiance of the authority of Indian rulers, and the taking to arms by a determined section of Kashmiri youth who are disillusioned about the farce of Indian parliamentary democracy: these two factors in tandem have lent quite a new complexion to the old Kashmir problem. The former is certainly the basic of these two factors, the prevalent feeling of national disgust and alienation from the Indian State is determining the Kashmiri youth's recourse to arms. On the other hand, the emergence of armed young rebels is playing an important role in galvanising and strengthening the resolve of Kashmiri masses to assert their independent national identity vis-a-vis the Indian State. It is this new complexion

acquired by the Kashmir problem that has set the alarm-bells ringing in the Indian ruling circles and they have come down heavily upon the Kashmiri people to instil dread of the Indian State-might in the Kashmiri mind.

In the heat of intra-party wrangling, the Union Minister for Railways, George Fernandes, blurted out the truth about the current State-terrorist policy towards Kashmir, "...the administration was of the view that the problem could only be solved by 'bringing the people into submission'". (PTI & UNI, Indian Express, May 20, 1990). How the blood-thirsty beast under the skin of these Gandhian hypocrites comes out snarling when the State-authority of the Indian rulers is at stake can be seen in one of the comments of Union Minister for Foreign Affairs, I.K. Gujral. In an interview in London, he said with least compunction, "The issue (in Kashmir) is not lives.... The issue is the durability of the Indian State. And the Indian State cannot be allowed to break — at any risk." (UNI, Indian Express, April 22, 1990). How brutal yet enlightening! It is a clear political confession by the Indian rulers that they are concerned neither with the sentiments and security of the Kashmiri people nor with the unity and integration of Kashmiri people with the people of the rest of India. What they are solely and terribly concerned with is the securing of Kashmir as their possession — "the durability of the Indian State" — no matter how many Kashmiri lives and other lives are cut off to get there. At the time of the Jalianwala Bagh massacre, for the British colonialists the issue was not the Indian lives but the durability of British Raj; for the Indian people, however, those disdainfully-exterminated Indian lives could not but be the issue that pronounced the insufferability of the British Raj. Today, the people of Kashmir are justified in drawing the conclusion that the Indian rulers, who have shown in practice and publicly declared their proclivity to slaughter the Kashmiris, have no right, other than the barbarian right of might, to

claim the Kashmiri people as subjects of the Indian State. And those Indians who are not driven to shame and anger and protest by this avowed barbarism of the Indian rulers, have no right to claim the Kashmiris as their fellow-countrymen and expect from the Kashmiris any reciprocal affinity with them.

Indian chauvinism to the rescue of State-terrorism:

The Indian rulers are well aware that, despite their best efforts, State-terrorist atrocities on ordinary Kashmiri masses could not be kept concealed from the Indian public, unlike the cases of such atrocities on the insurgent nationalities of the remote north-eastern parts of India. They know that knowledge of the ruthlessness and the enormity of State repression would surely give rise to a general feeling of disgust and public outcry against them. So, in order to forestall adverse public reaction, they vociferously played up the Pakistani connection of the Kashmiri turbulence, artificially created an atmosphere of confrontation with Pakistan, and invoked Indian chauvinist against alleged Pakistani designs of grabbing Kashmir. And they have, by and large, succeeded in distracting the attention of the common people of India from the State atrocities that are being perpetrated on the Kashmiri masses. Also, the vital question of the national and democratic rights of the Kashmiri people between the Indian rulers and their Pakistani counterparts. The question of Indo-Pak contention over Kashmir was made the focus of public attention and concern.

Due to the historical circumstance of the carving out of the two States, India and Pakistan, in a maze of civil destruction and man-slaughter, and the subsequent wars that were imposed on the two peoples by their respective rulers, the common man in India takes Pakistan for a relentless and wicked foe of India and vice-versa. Hence, the alleged Pakistani designs against India, or alleged Pakistani connection of any political force or movement in India, usually generate the high-tide of Indian chauvinism, the like of which no other patriotic concern can

boast of. Thus, the Indian rulers, through wilful branding of the just struggle of the Kashmiri masses as "Pakistan-instigated disturbance" and the armed groups of rebellious Kashmiri youth as "Pakistani agents", have more or less neutralised the intensity of the incipient public reaction against their State-terrorist operations in Kashmir.

Excepting the sort of false legitimisation of the reign of terror in Kashmir resting on the perverted logic of Indian chauvinism, the Indian rulers have absolutely no justification for unleashing terror on the Kashmiri people. Given a proper and sustained exposure-campaign by communist revolutionaries, democratic elements and other conscientious citizens of India against the falsehoods and misdeeds of Indian rulers with respect to the struggling Kashmiri people, the Indian rulers would stand condemned in the eyes of the Indian public, in due course of time.

Kashmir is not an integral part of India :

Indian ruling classes' politicians of all hues seek to falsify history by chanting, day in and day out, that the Kashmir is an integral part of India. How and when did Kashmir become an integral part of the Indian Union? They have no coherent and common answer to this question. Counting on the common man's non-familiarity with the matter, they fly in the face of incontrovertible facts pertaining to the unsettled question of Kashmir's statehood.

The Instrument of Accession (signed by the then rulers of the State of Jammu & Kashmir as a contractual arrangement for enabling the entry of Indian Union army to check the Pakistan-inspired tribal invasion of Kashmir) was a provisional document. Under its terms, the people of Kashmir reserved their uncurtailed right of determining their statehood, i.e., exercising their option of becoming a constituent part of the State of Indian Union, or a constituent part of the State of Pakistan, or an independent State of Kashmir. The then Indian government repeatedly proclaimed that India would

stand by the treaty-obligations and that the people of Kashmir would be given the opportunity to exercise that option, as soon as normal conditions got restored in Kashmir. At a more solemn level, the Indian Constituent Assembly, while providing for Kashmir's autonomous status in the Indian Union under Article 370, reiterated the right of the people of Kashmir to accept or reject that arrangement by their free self-determination. Yet, the people of Kashmir were never given the opportunity for exercising that option. Now, the Indian rulers cannot justify their renegeing from that commitment by pointing to Pakistan's default on that score. The argument that Pakistan's refusal to vacate the forcible occupation of a part of Kashmir entitles India to hold on to the other part without the express consent of the people of Kashmir, is a sheer bandit-argument. Actually, it is this anti-democratic propensity of the Indian rulers -- their reliance on force, deception and manipulative politics in dealing with the people of Kashmir; their mistrust of Kashmiri people which found expression in the latter being kept out of the top administrative posts; and, in general, their cheating of the Kashmiris even on the initially-promised autonomous status -- that has smothered the probability of Kashmir becoming an integral part of India.

Peoples' right to self-determination, not the integrity of Indian State, is inviolable :

The right of Kashmiri people to national self-determination does not merely rest on the historical facts of the case. Even if Kashmir were an integral part of the Indian State, that right would still be intact as a democratic right of Kashmiri people, like that of other nationalities in India. In the modern world, that is a universally-recognised democratic right of all nations. None can claim to uphold the basic principles of democracy while repudiating the right of nations to self-determination.

The Indian rulers are very fond of referring to all sorts of diversity residing in the composite entity of India but they invariably stop short of mentioning the national diversity of India. As if their unwillingness to acknowledge the obvious fact of India being a multinational country could do away with the national question in India! Well, their pretensions to running "the largest democracy of the world" come in the way of formally repudiating the right of nations to self-determination. So, by-passing the national question in India, they seek to dismiss the right of national self-determination by raising the battle-cry against "separatism" and asserting the inviolability of the integrity of Indian State.

Now, what stuff this integrity of Indian State is made of, the Indian rulers do not tell. The integrity of a democratic State is determined by the national integrity of its people which itself is the end-product of the objective integration of the economic, social and cultural life of the people and the attendant national consciousness and commitment. Likewise, the integrity of a multinational democratic State is determined by the voluntary union of the constituent nations or peoples, on the basis of equal status, mutual respect and mutual benefit. Then, the integrity of a democratic State is regarded as inviolable with reference to outside forces.

Because, any tampering with this integrity by some outside force becomes a violation of the national will of the people or common will of the nations-in-union. On the contrary, the integrity of a colonial State or a feudal State is determined by the sway of the ruler's sword, for it is quite alien to the general democratic rights or the national will of the people concerned. There can be nothing inviolable about the integrity of such a State. By virtue of its own rationale, the integrity of a colonial or a feudal State is always liable to modification depending upon the waxing and waning

of the sway of its ruler's sword vis-a-vis the rulers of other States, the rebellion of a chieftain, or struggle for national independence of a people from within. So, from the standpoint of democracy, what is inviolable is the national will of the people, integrally or severally; the integrity of a State is inviolable so long as it is an embodiment of that national will.

The present-day semi-colonial, semi-feudal State of India is, essentially, a legacy of the British colonial State of India. The integrity of British India had been forged and maintained by dint of British colonial might, against the will of the emergent nations of the Indian subcontinent or the will of the Indian people in general. Even the States of the Indian Union and Pakistan respectively were carved out of British India -- in other words, they came into existence only by "violating" the integrity of the then State of India. Afterwards, the State of Bangladesh came into existence (leaving aside the aspect of Indian intervention) only by "violating" the integrity of the original State of Pakistan. There is nothing exceptional about the integrity of the present-day Indian State to make it alone sacrosanct. Moreover, the Indian rulers invoke this phoney inviolability of the integrity of the Indian State only when confronted with the prospect of some nationality's secession from India. They conveniently put it to sleep when they come across an opportunity for annexing some nationality to India, as happened in the case of the Sikkimese people. Evidently, the incorporation of the State of Sikkim is as much a modification of the integrity of the Indian State as would be the dissociation of a nationality, say Mizo people, from India.

Thus, the so-called inviolability of the integrity of the Indian State is a figment of the Indian ruling classes, the big bourgeoisie and the landlords subservient to imperialism. It is a colonial-feudal assertion of the right of might which cannot invalidate the democratic right to

national self-determination of any constituent nationality of India, least of all the right of the Kashmiri people. If allowed to go unchallenged by democratic forces, it can only play an anti-national role of undermining the fragile bond of unity among the constituent nationalities of India by providing an ideological justification for disregarding and forcibly suppressing their national sentiments and aspirations.

Contrary social interests dictate contrary approaches to the Kashmir problem :

The present-day Indian rulers and the Indian people, owing to their basically conflicting social interests, cannot afford to have an identical approach to the Kashmir problem. As on all vital political issues, on the Kashmir problem too, the oppressor Indian rulers and the oppressed Indian people are bound to get ranged against each other.

In India, there is no single dominant nation that oppresses other nations. The source of national oppression lies in the continuing colonial hold over India of various imperialist powers, particularly U.S. imperialism and Soviet social imperialism, through the instrumentality of the lackey Indian ruling classes, the big bourgeoisie and the landlords. That is to say, the Indian people, belonging to various nationalities and tribal communities, are all common victims of indirect imperialist oppression that restrains their overall national development as well as the particular development of each nationality. Thus, there is no basic conflict of national interests among various peoples of India. Rather, their respective national interests objectively converge on the common basic task of overthrowing the rule of imperialism and its subservient Indian partners, for opening up the path of their self-reliant democratic development (to be pursued, individually or collectively, on their own volition).

No doubt, there exist national prejudices, uneven levels of socio-economic development of

various nationalities, relative neglect of small, especially border nationalities (in matters of allocation of national economic resources, access to job opportunities, and provision of more than symbolic participation in national polity), cases of unwelcome influx of refugees and settlers to the traditional lands of some nationalities which undermines the national preponderance of the native people, and the prevalent tendency to disregard the national-cultural sensibilities of non-Hindi-speaking peoples. These elements of national inequality or discrimination exist, however, as a special aspect of the general phenomenon of national oppression of the Indian people as a whole by imperialism and its Indian lackeys in State power.

In other words, first, as regards the basic deprivation of national independence and prospects of national development, all the nationalities (without discrimination) are at the receiving end, irrespective of the incidence of relative discrimination. Secondly, even the elements of relative discrimination against some nationalities owe their existence to the retrogressive policies of Indian rulers who are multi-national in composition and anti-national in character. These elements are either the specific by-product of their general policies for promoting the semi-colonial semi-feudal pattern of economic development, or the product of their specific policies for thwarting intra-nationality cohesion, inter-nationality amity and solidarity of working people of all the nationalities. As the existence or non-existence of these elements of relative discrimination does not determine, either way, the fate of national oppression of each nationality and the Indian people in general, this factor or the struggle over it, in itself, is of no strategic significance, either to the oppressors (the Indian ruling classes and their imperialist patrons), or to the oppressed (the Indian people).

Nevertheless, this factor, in connection with the struggle over the basic issue of national

oppression, is of considerable significance to both insofar as it adversely affects the mutual relations of various nationalities in India. As it causes (or becomes a pretext for causing) misunderstanding, mistrust and estrangement among various nationalities, and thus hampers the consolidation of forces of all the oppressed peoples of India in the struggle for national liberation against their common oppressors, this factor operates against the basic interests of the Indian people and in favour of the Indian rulers. Hence, their own interests demand that the Indian people should unfalteringly oppose every manifestation of relative discrimination against any nationality of India.

It should be clear from the fore-stated features of the national question in India that the basic interests of the Indian people in general, as against those of the Indian rulers, are incompatible with the national oppression of or discrimination against any of the constituent nationalities of India. That is the objective basis for them to raise the banner of unity of all the Indian peoples in contest with the Indian rulers' banner of integrity of Indian State. However, unless this objective basis finds tangible expression in their actual opposition to national oppression or relative national discrimination, the banner of all the Indian peoples' unity cannot acquire credibility with those nationalities who have grievances concerning relative discrimination or feelings of estrangement due to ill-treatment at the hands of the Indian rulers. And the most explicit, consistent and comprehensive version of such an opposition is the firm stand of upholding the right of every constituent nationality of India to national self-determination. On the part of the common people, belonging to any of the national groups, the upholding of the right of other nationalities to national self-determination is a way of politically demarcating themselves from the Indian rulers and clearing the decks for the united struggles of all the nationalities against the

common national oppressors.

Therefore, unlike the oppressor ruling classes, only the oppressed people of India, most of all the working class, who have no vested interests in retaining or annexing any national territory against the wishes of its native people, can sincerely and consistently uphold the right of the Kashmiri people to national self-determination. The upholders of colonial-feudal oppression and exploitation — be they rulers of India or of other lands — may resort to transient political posturing in support of the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination just to entice the Kashmiri people, but they would soon come out in their true colours as diehard opponents of this right.

The Indian rulers' earlier hypocritical stance of upholding the Kashmiri people's right to national self-determination and the subsequent volte-face on this issue has already come under mention. The conduct of the Pakistani rulers, in this respect, is no different either. Their loud protestations of support for national self-determination by Kashmiris in the India-held portion of Kashmir only, have all along been transparently insincere and mischievous and made in anticipation of a Kashmiri decision joining Pakistan on consideration of religion. Now, apprehending the possible repercussions in the Pak-held portion of Kashmir of the slogan of independent Kashmir that is arising from the valley, the Pakistani rulers have unabashedly declared that the relevant U.N. resolutions (on holding referendum in Kashmir to decide the question of its Statehood) do not stipulate the option of the Kashmiri people for an independent Statehood. So much for the Pakistani rulers' upholding of the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination.

The other fake protagonists of the Kashmiri national self-determination are the U.S. imperialist rulers and the British imperialist rulers who

are greatly responsible for turning the Kashmir issue into a perennial political tangle — a live-wire of tension between India and Pakistan — that lends additional scope for their imperialist interference in and manipulation of Indo-Pak affairs. The U.S. imperialist rulers were keen, in the immediate post-World War II period, to get hold of Kashmir, because of its strategic location, as a military outpost against the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China (specifically, for setting up in the higher reaches of Kashmir an electronic surveillance-station to spy on the latter). To that end, they encouraged for a while the idea of an independent Kashmir and pushed the U.N. resolutions on holding referendum in Kashmir. Today, in the changed international situation and military technology, their earlier requirement has faded away, and they can be seen advocating the bilateral settlement of the Kashmir issue by India and Pakistan, on the basis of the Shimla Agreement, without any reference to the people of Kashmir whose Statehood is the issue to be settled.

Thus, all these vultures, the various imperialist powers along with the client States of India and Pakistan, may very well adopt varying or conflicting stances on the Kashmir issue, according to their respective selfish considerations of the moment; still, their general social interests converge on the basic approach of opposing the proper national self-determination by the Kashmiri people. The underlying reason for the imperialist ruling cliques to take that approach is not that there can be any threat to their neo-colonial hold, even in case of a separate State of Kashmir. That approach is imbued with the well-based apprehension that the involvement of the broad masses of Kashmiri people in the political act of deliberating and deciding the issue of their national Statehood, is likely to help them recognise the semi-colonial semi-feudal social basis of their national oppression and the anti-imperialist anti-feudal orientation of their struggle for liberation

ie, the real substance of their national self-determination.

For what is the appraisal of the Kashmiri struggle required?

For upholding the right of the Kashmiri people to national self-determination, one need not go into the concrete political appraisal of the ongoing struggle of the Kashmiri people; because, the defence of that right does not rest on one's political appraisal of any particular struggle waged by the Kashmiri people, in their quest for freedom from national oppression. That sort of political appraisal would be required for deciding one's attitude towards that particular struggle of the Kashmiri people. Therefore, differences of political perception or reservations regarding any aspect of the present Kashmiri struggle should not come in the way of upholding, without reservations, the right of Kashmiri people to self-determination. Upholding of that right without reservations does not mean giving a blank cheque of political support to any act or decision whatever of the Kashmiri people. The people of other nationalities are not supposed to forgo their own democratic right of political opinion and discretion with respect to the Kashmir problem, in the process of defending the democratic right of the Kashmiri people. Upholding of that right without reservations simply means affirming the position that the Kashmiri people have the exclusive right to decide their own national status or destiny, and that any extraneous pressure or use of force to deny or distort the exercise of this right by the Kashmiri people is impermissible. In this respect, others are obliged to respect the decision of the Kashmiri people whatsoever and not necessarily concur with or approve of that decision. Moreover, others may politically influence the Kashmiri people, through fraternal suggestions, criticism and persuasion, to arrive at this or that decision; but, they would be doing so strictly on the basis of the

explicit assurance of respecting whatever decision the Kashmiri people prefer to take. Of course, the Kashmiri people would judge the genuineness of such fraternal concern and assurance not just by formal declarations of the same on the part of other people, but chiefly by their active opposition to the suppression of the Kashmiri voice.

No doubt, without making political appraisal of the present struggle of the Kashmiri people, and without determining the nature and extent of support that is to be extended to this struggle on the basis of that political appraisal, the other people's upholding of the right of Kashmiri people to national self-determination would entail a fraternal support of a general and negative kind only. It remains a negative kind of fraternal support in the sense that they would be limiting themselves to opposing the Indian rulers' use of force to keep the Kashmiri people tagged to the Indian State, without making common cause with the Kashmiri people in the given struggle. It remains a general kind of fraternal support in the sense that it would be extended to any mass effort, (not the present one in particular) on the part of the Kashmiris (or of any other Indian people) to assert their national identity.

As is true of all political cases, in the case of the present struggle of the Kashmiri people too, positive fraternal support to this struggle would depend on whether, and to what extent, the common interests (of the people of all nationalities) get expressed in the struggle. To put it differently, to the extent the present struggle of the Kashmiri people gravitates towards challenging the socio-political source of their national oppression and thus acquiring an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal orientation, it would accordingly elicit the positive fraternal support from the people of all nationalities, that might extend up to the realisation of a common front of struggle for overthrowing the rule of imperialism and native reactionaries.

Some outstanding aspects of the present Kashmir movement :

The present Kashmiri movement presents a complicated political complexion. As yet, it is in a state of flux as regards its political objectives, leadership, alignment of forces and the course of action. Even as the process of crystallisation of its political features is taking place amidst its whirling motion, some of its aspects are already evident. Basing on the noticeable aspects of the present Kashmiri movement, a broad political appraisal can be made for immediate purposes. There are some positive aspects wherein lies the strength of the present movement; but there are also some negative aspects that show its limitations and weaknesses as a national movement.

One outstanding positive aspect of the present Kashmiri national movement is the wide and intense involvement of the masses of Kashmiri people. The compulsive official lying, news-suppression and dis-information campaigns on the part of the Indian governmental authorities notwithstanding, almost every Indian or foreign eye-witness of the turbulent happenings in Kashmir over the recent months has testified to the mass character of the movement. Since the last quarter of 1988, especially since the massacres of January 21-22, 1990 (when thousands of peaceful demonstrators, protesting against the first large-scale police raids and searches of residential areas of Srinagar, were subjected to indiscriminate and vengeful shootings by para-military forces), the Kashmiri people have been demonstrating their mass defiance of the Indian State's authority, on every conceivable opportunity.

The most telling scenes of Kashmiri people's determination, intensity of involvement, and fearlessness have been occurring more in the engagements between the paramilitary forces and the defiant unarmed masses of the people, than in the armed encounters between the bands of Kashmiri militants and the paramilitary forces. This aspect

signifies that the present movement has roused the masses of Kashmiri people to political life. This development has wide political ramifications which go beyond the confines of the immediate context of the present movement. Already, owing to the involvement of the masses of the lower ranks of Kashmiri society — the weavers, artisans, petty shopkeepers, petty government employees and sundry labourers etc, the echo of their social resentment against the tiny native crust of get-rich-quick contractors, corrupt politicians and bureaucrats (who fatten under the existing set-up and whose elitist life-styles present a sharp contrast to the want and neglect of the people's own social existence) is coming up in their outpourings of national resentment against Indian domination. In the immediate context of the present movement, this aspect lends the movement not only political weight, such that no serious political force in India can afford to take a dismissive attitude towards it, but also political stamina, such that the steamroller of Indian State power can no longer stamp it out, whatever vicissitudes the movement may have to undergo.

Another positive aspect of the present movement is that, despite the religious factor having a bearing on the movement, it is not overwhelmed by the communal tendency and has, in the main, preserved the non-communal tradition of the past struggles of the Kashmiri people. This seemingly unremarkable attribute of the present movement acquires significance in view of the considerable counter-pressure that certain circumstantial factors bring to bear upon it. The Indian ruling classes have, during the past decade, built up an atmosphere of communal mistrust and tension throughout the country. The way Hindu revivalism and communal chauvinism has been boosted and allowed to assume menacing proportions, it has aggravated the sense of insecurity among various religious minorities, especially the Muslim community, raised serious doubts among them about

the professed secular character of the Indian State, and provided ample grist to the mill of minority communal chauvinism. The state of Jammu & Kashmir is the only Muslim-majority state in India. This fact makes it convenient for the Muslim communalist elements to make out the discrimination and humiliation of the Kashmiri people, at the hands of the Indian rulers, to be the consequence of the religious bias of the Indian State. Such a view, of the underlying cause of the national-social woes of the Kashmiri people, is reinforced by the sly attempts of the Indian rulers, to aggravate and exploit the contradictions between the Kashmiris and the Jammuites, and between the traditionally underprivileged Kashmiri Muslim population and the privileged stratum of Kashmiri Pandits (who used to have the lion's share in land-ownership in the princely State of Jammu & Kashmir and, today, find place in the top echelons of the all-India and the State bureaucracy).§

Then there are the Pakistani rulers who are openly and persistently after making it a communal problem by trumpeting their false concern and support for the rights of the "Muslim Umma", especially the Muslims of Jammu & Kashmir. And

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How the Indian rulers themselves give a communal colouring to the Kashmir problem, can be seen from the following seemingly innocuous statement of the Indian Foreign Minister. After pointing out that India has the second largest Muslim community in the world and that Muslims in Kashmir formed a small segment of that, Mr. Gujral said, "we cannot and shall not divide the country again on religious basis...we cannot accept the idea that any part of India should be allowed to secede on the basis of religion..." (UNI, Indian Express, April 22, 1990.) As if the Kashmir problem were rooted in the fact of it being a Muslim-majority territory! As if the Indian rulers were inclined to "accept the idea... on the basis of" some other factor but religion!!

finally, the movement is under pressure from the native Muslim fundamentalist forces, chiefly the Jamaat-e-Islami and its military wing, the Hizbul Mujahideen, who are straining to the hilt to get a hold on the movement and divert it onto the communalist rails. In the face of all these vitiating factors, it is not a mean achievement of the present movement that it has so far yielded not much ground to the communalist infection.

Another somewhat positive aspect of the present movement is this that the idea of national "independence" has caught the imagination of the Kashmiri masses. The predominant popular mood is well-expressed in the refrain, "Humain aur badshahi naheen chahiye" (We don't need alien rule). Indian rule is definitively rejected. The longing for self-rule excludes a sponsored government of any clique of local parliamentary politicians. The Indian model of pseudo-parliamentary democracy stands discredited, in the eyes of Kashmiri youth for its being not fair and representative enough, and in the eyes of the urban poor for its having no role in their woeful living conditions. (The following cryptic dialogue between a young Kashmiri militant and an Indian journalist depicts the typical state of mind of the urban youth:

Is he ready to die?

"Of course".

"For Pakistan?"

"Not for Pakistan, not for India. For independence."

"Why not try the democracy you already have?"

"We've tried it. It doesn't work. For us, all politicians are fakes, liars, thieves." —India Today, cover story, May 31, 1989.

Contrary to the prevalent impression in other parts of India, the majority of Kashmiris are still not keen to merge with Pakistan. One of the reasons for taking such an impression is the involuntary tendency of common Indians to make no distinction between Pakistan and the Pakistan-held

part of Kashmir (same as they do in the case of India and Indian-held Kashmir). (Unlike the partition of the pre-1947 Bengal and Punjab that sealed the respective fates of these nationalities through the bloody communal exchange of populations, the Kashmiri nationality is merely divided by a cease-fire line and forcibly kept apart by the Indian and the Pakistani armies. So, for the Kashmiris of the valley the "par" (across the cease-fire line) stands primarily for the other half of their nationality and land. Their sense of identification with and attraction for the other half situated in Pakistan should not automatically be construed as their eagerness to merge with Pakistan. Despite serious estrangement with and anger against the Indian State, theirs is not a simple refrain that they want separation from India and amalgamation with Pakistan. The main emphasis is on the point that they are the ones, not India or Pakistan, who should decide the fate of Kashmir. That such sentiment is not restricted to the valley but also percolating to the other half of Kashmir, shows itself through the Muzza Muzza Farabad incident as reported by the Statesman, March 22, 1990: "...hundreds of students wanting total independence for Kashmir clashed in Muzza Farabad in Pakistan-held Kashmir yesterday with others seeking to unite it with Pakistan, local journalists said." One of the reasons for the comparative popularity of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front lies in its stand of an independent Kashmir that reflects the wider layer of the popular sentiment.

The chief negative aspect of the present movement, which many of its other limitations and weaknesses flow from or link up with, is its utterly rudderless character, ideologically as well as politically. The largely spontaneous character of the mass upsurge, that is the strong point of the movement in the immediate context, becomes, in juxtaposition with the heterogeneity and political shallowness of the movement's present

leadership, a strategic liability. The spontaneous mass movement could at best express its social motives, negatively in their active rejection of Indian State authority, and positively only in hazy notions of independence and self-rule. Only the political leadership of the movement could lend definitiveness, clarity and expanse to such notions by setting forth the goals and orientation of the movement. But, the only concrete programme that has been handed down to the mass movement by the political leadership as a whole is the two-point programme: ouster of the Indian Army and plebiscite. These may be rightful demands of the Kashmiri people and deemed fit to serve as a concise action programme -- the political means to realise some political-social objective. That political-social objective remaining undefined, the two-point programme of the leadership goes no further than the political perspective which the mass movement is already reflecting.

It is not strange on the part of the Muslim fundamentalist forces to cover up the bankruptcy of their social ideology and the obscurantist nature of their social designs by putting forward religious catch-words in lieu of the political social objectives of the movement. The slogan advanced by one of the sundry fundamentalist outfits, the Kashmir Al umar Mujahideen, is typical of their programmatic evasions: "Al Umar ka matlab kya, la ilaha ilallah" (The Al Umar stands for what, there is one God, the Absolute).

In this regard, the JKLF, which is the most important and comparatively well-organised of all the groups contending for political hegemony over the movement, comes out with a semblance of a political goal -- an independent, secular and neutral State of Kashmir. In case of JKLF too, "independent Kashmir" just means a State of Kashmir separate from India and Pakistan. The political content of this independence of the proposed Kashmir State is not even hinted at, leave aside the blacking out of the most vital

aspect of the State character concerning democracy. With this stance, the question of national oppression and underdevelopment of the Kashmiri people is left essentially untouched. This inability or unwillingness of the present JKLF leadership to address itself to the substance of national oppression, and consequently of national self-determination -- ie, the placement of the Kashmiri people vis-a-vis imperialist neo-colonialism -- serves to tether the Kashmiri national movement to the level of its spontaneous political awareness.

This renders the movement ill-equipped to face the political pressures and intrigues of its crafty enemies and false friends. It indicates the essentially national reformist outlook of the present JKLF leadership, notwithstanding its taking to arms against the Indian State. Their eclectic manner of drawing inspiration from sources ranging from the Palestinian intifada to the recent East-European developments, only reinforces the above observation regarding the political outlook of JKLF leaders. This basic flaw in the JKLF leadership's political perception of the Kashmiri national question is the primary reason why it has not been able to make much headway in the rural areas of Kashmir. For, unlike the urban petit-bourgeoisie, it is extremely difficult to arouse the peasantry of Kashmir with the vague slogan of "independence" that does not connect with their concrete experience of national oppression and oppressors. (The same Kashmiri peasantry had, in the past, tremendously responded to the anti-feudal call of struggle against the autocratic rule of Maharaja Hari Singh). That is the reason why the JKLF leadership seeks support of other nations on the plea of justice but does not, and cannot, seek it from various nationalities of India and Pakistan, on the plea of common interests of liberation from national oppression. Having thus dropped the due claim to the fraternal support of the oppressed nationalities of India and Pakistan, the JKLF leadership is obliged to strike opportunistic alliances with, or conciliatory

postures towards, those forces (the authorities of Pak-held Kashmir and the Muslim-fundamentalist groups of the India-held Kashmir) whose political objectives conflict with its own, in order to get support and help from across the ceasefire line.

The other outstanding negative aspect of the present movement is the failure of its mainstream to clearly demarcate itself from the communal-fascist actions of some Muslim-fundamentalist outfits, chiefly the Hizbul-Muzahideen, who are following in the footsteps of the Khalistani communal-fascists, both in threatening and attacking the common people, and in playing into the hands of various imperialist agencies. These reactionary elements as yet constitute a small segment of the movement, and the scale and intensity of their anti-people actions are nowhere near the murderous onslaughts of Khalistani communal-fascists. Nevertheless, they are seriously harming the movement by vitiating the communal atmosphere in Kashmir and elsewhere and thus aiding the Indian rulers' efforts for defaming and isolating the movement at the all-India level. Moreover, due to the interplay of so many negative circumstantial factors and the serious political limitations of the JKLF leadership, there is quite a scope for these forces to gain ascendancy in the movement and eventually drag it into selfdestructive channels.

These elements are trying to cash in on another specific factor in the Kashmir situation. Although on the whole the present movement is not directed against the Hindu population of Kashmir, its support base is limited to Muslims, and there are almost as many non-Kashmiri Muslims in Jammu & Kashmir as there are Kashmiri Muslims. Presently the movement is mainly based on the Kashmiri Muslims for the obvious reason of its being a Kashmiri national movement. But the Muslim fundamentalist forces are striving to draw in the non-Kashmiri Muslims on the basis of religious appeal. If such an effort on their part is not effectively

countered by the JKLF and other secular forces, through unambiguously asserting the Kashmiri national character of the movement, the scope for the growth of the communal-fascist trend will get enlarged. Because such an eventuality would not only go against the interests of the Kashmiri national movement but also undermine the unity of the people of Kashmir with the broad Indian people, demarcation from and condemnation of the communal-fascist trend is in the common interests of all the peoples, particularly the working masses of all the peoples. However, this requirement should not be allowed to dilute or distract from their task of concentrating the blow against the Indian State-terrorism in Kashmir.

In sum, the Kashmiri people are on just grounds in their present struggle against the domination and the suppressive State-violence of the Indian rulers. There is a valorous mass upsurge in defiance of Indian State authority. It is inspired by a vague longing for independence and self-rule. But its present main leadership, the JKLF, is failing it by default of matching political orientation. Owing to its essentially national reformist political outlook, this leadership is pegging the Kashmiri national movement to the partial political aim of exercising formal self-determination, towards carving out a separate Kashmir State, without challenging the neo-colonial grip of imperialism. Should it materialise, such a State of Kashmir would neither be really independent nor democratic. That would be a poor recompense for the great exertion and sacrifices of the Kashmiri masses, and, in effect, a betrayal of their longing for national emancipation. Only if the Kashmiri democratic forces, having anti-imperialist anti-feudal political orientation, gain ascendancy, and if the active fraternal support of all the oppressed Indian masses is secured on the basis of common interests, would the leadership of the Kashmiri national movement be able to withstand the strong enemy-pressure and the challenge of Muslim-

fundamentalist forces (some of whom are backed by the Pakistani and the Western imperialist agencies).

Hence, proceeding from the prime consideration of safeguarding the unity of broad masses of the Indian people and the Kashmiri masses against imperialism and its native lackeys, the Indian people should,

(a) Actively oppose the Indian State-terrorist onslaught against the Kashmiri people, demanding an immediate end to atrocities by Indian paramilitary forces on the Kashmiri public under the pretext of curbing Pak-instigated terrorist activities, withdrawal of Indian paramilitary forces from J & K, and cancellation of all black State promulgations that give extra-ordinary powers to the administration and the armed forces for repressing the Kashmiri people;

(b) Support the Kashmiri people's just struggle for self-defence against the Indian State-terrorism;

(c) Condemn the communal-fascist actions of the Hizbul Mujahideen against the common people of Kashmir and encourage the secular and democratic forces in Kashmir to paralyse such elements;

(d) Unreservedly uphold the right of Kashmiri people to national self-determination, urging upon the Kashmiri people to seek the unification of the their nationality and self-determination on the basis of national independence from imperialism and democratic freedom from comprador-feudal autocracy without which their demand of plebiscite would take them nowhere, and to make common cause with Indian people's democratic revolutionary struggle, while leaving it completely upto them to realise and decide or decide and realise what course they should take, and opposing forcible suppression of their rightful demand of plebiscite;

(e) Expose and oppose the intrigues of various imperialist powers towards distorting and utilising the Kashmir problem for increasing their interference in and control of the political affairs of both India and Pakistan.

USSR, East Europe :

Proletariat Once More at the Battle-lines

Following the death of Stalin, and following the revisionist coup decades ago which re-established capitalism in the Soviet Union and the East European countries, these countries have found themselves in growing economic crises of a capitalist nature. For the working class of these countries, the socialist mask of the rulers in this period was a major obstacle in perceiving their class character.

Today, as these countries are rapidly undressing their capitalism of its disguises, the capitalist crises they are facing are taking on distinctly capitalist forms. The various schemes underway to 'salvage' these economies now unremittingly and openly throw the burden of these supposed salvage operations onto the backs of the working class. In particular, massive price rises are being ordered as a means of effectively robbing the workers' pay packets and transferring surpluses to the owners of capital, and retrenchments on a grand scale are multiplying the existing reserve army of labour.

For the workers, the combined effect -- of the political 'liberation' they are supposedly enjoying, and the intensified enslavement they are actually experiencing -- becomes the point of rapid education in political economy (ie, how they are looted of surplus value). And this fuels their class hatreds. These hatreds find innumerable forms of expression, direct and indirect. It is this righteous wrath of the working class that constitutes the main worry of international capital as it invests in these countries.

Domestic and international capital hope to suppress and divert these class hatreds with slogans of bourgeois democracy. In the process,

Andhra Pradesh :

Agency Areas Land Problem and the Communist Revolutionaries

In the lives of the girijans in the agency areas — as also for the rural poor in the plains — the land problem is the basic and unresolved problem. All the policies of the successive governments, representing the feudal classes, have protected the feudal interests. Indeed, the girijan problem in the agency areas is not a problem between girijans and non-girijans. Girijans are a part of the oppressed masses of India, and with their own particular pattern of life, culture and tradition, they have a distinct place in the wealth of India. We need to note here that not only do girijans face exploitation; in addition, their very distinct life-patterns, culture and traditions are in danger. The organisations working among the girijans must keep in mind this specificity about them while linking the girijans' struggle to the countrywide fight against feudal and semi-feudal exploitation. Secondly, they must formulate demands which take into account the class character of the State machinery implementing the various 'schemes' for the girijans. In particular, the attempts by the State to deceive the girijans into giving up control over matters relating to their own land have to be exposed in the formulation of demands.

Whenever the girijans got organised and rose in struggle for the resolution of the land problem, successive governments resorted to brutal repression. The entire girijan movement in the erstwhile Srikakulam district, had surged in the process of girijans rallying into struggle against feudal exploitation, and progressed into a powerful movement aimed at the basic resolution of the land problem. On the other hand, governed by feudal class interests, the Government's policy was to

intensify the repression and create havoc through barbaric killings of cadres and people.

Scrapping of Regulation 1/70 :

Given the phenomenon of mass revolutionary struggle, and depending on the level and extent of the activities of the revolutionaries, successive governments have also been trying to deceive and divert the people by doling out certain concessions or welfare measures in the agency areas of Andhra Pradesh, in particular, starting deliberately with the Srikakulam agency area.

The Agency Tracts (Interest and Land Transfer) Act was promulgated in 1917 in the agency areas of Andhra Pradesh, claiming to protect the girijans' interests. This progressed, in the course of girijan movements, into Regulation 1 of 1970. On January 24, 1989, the then chief minister N.T.Rama Rao, going against even a judgement of the Supreme Court, declared the abolition of this Regulation (some details of this were published in the Comrade, no.3). In spite of the methods adopted to camouflage this anti-people step, it soon attracted wide attention. In particular, it drew the attention of all the revolutionary groups working in the agency areas of Andhra Pradesh (People's War group, however remained aloof from the agitation). These revolutionary groups as well as some voluntary organisations undertook and intensified a campaign and agitation against this offensive step, in all the agency areas. There was a spate of girijans' demonstrations and a series of articles and editorials appeared in the press.

A peasant organisation, the Andhra Pradesh Rytu Coolie Sangham (Peasant and Agricultural Labour Union) took the initiative and, while inviting different revolutionary groups and mass organisations, organised a seminar against the scrapping of the Land Regulation Act 1/70, at Govinda Rao Pet in Warangal district. The police obstructed the holding of this seminar. Subsequently, this organisation again held a meeting in Hyderabad on

April 30, 1989. In this meeting the Agency Prantha Girijana Hakkula Parirakshana Porata Samithi (Association for Struggle for the Protection of Girijan Rights in the Agency Areas), was formed.

Differing Viewpoints :

In the course of the agitation against the scrapping of Regulation 1/70, some differences came to the fore. A view advocating certain exceptions for some sections of non-girijans came to the fore as a main issue.

The group holding this view, the CPI(ML)-"Prajapandha" group, proposed, while demanding withdrawal of the government's decision to scrap Regulation 1/70, certain amendments nevertheless to Regulation 1/70 exempting non-girijans holding 5 acres of wet lands or 10 acres of dry lands.

As distinct from this, the Agency Prantha Girijan Hakkula Parirakshana Porata Samithi (hereafter called 'Porata Samithi') held the following view: the decision to scrap Regulation 1/70 should be withdrawn. Further the Grama Praja Committeelu (Village People's Committees) should be given full powers to decide for or against on all matters - pertaining to implementation of the Girijan Acts, resolution of conflicts on the land issue in the scheduled areas, and utilisation of the produce. The pattas for all types of land should be given to the girijans and to labouring non-girijans, ie, to those who are peasants as duly considered and determined by the village committees.

The Girijan Sangam functioning in the Bhadrageeri and Seethampeta agency areas of the erstwhile Srikakulam district advocated the following stand: the decision to scrap Regulation 1/70 should be withdrawn. Only the village girijan committees should have the powers to resolve the land issue in the scheduled areas and on matters concerning the protection and utilisation of the forests and forest produce. Only those non-girijan peasants should be allowed to possess lands, whom the village girijan committee determined to be non-

girijan poor peasants and determines to be earning their living only from the lands they are already cultivating. To the non-girijan poor who have no land to cultivate, the government should provide proper means of livelihood or compensation.

Specificity of girijan condition :

While examining the different views thus expressed, we have to keep in mind that, though the task pertaining to land in the agency areas is part of the country-wide basic task concerning the land problem, there is a particularity to the task in the agency areas: It is that, while it is the girijan who brought land in the agency areas under cultivation, the non-girijans, whether rich or poor, without exception have all come to possess land by taking it from the girijans -- through force and deception, or through trading relations, or through usury. The girijans, divested of land, not only became coolies (landless labourers) or paleru (employed labour on an yearly basis by the landlord), but also became bonded labourers. This apart from their day-to-day material living conditions, gives a particular dimension to their social life, their culture and their education. The particular relation of the girijans to the land is defined by the fact that they have lost the lands they had brought under cultivation.

It is, therefore, proper to allow land to only those non-girijan peasants who, however they may have earlier occupied the land and brought it under cultivation, are cultivating it themselves and are dependent for their livelihood solely on it. Other than this, there should be no exception in the name of 'poor people' or on the basis of 'size of land holding'. After all, even without any such legal exemptions, it is the girijan to date who has been driven from the land. For example: non-girijans frequently deceive girijan women, marry them, and control the lands in the name of those women. Even by official statistics, only 69,900 acres are in the hands of girijans while 8,70,000 acres are now

in the hands of non-girijans. This has happened without the existence of any legal exemptions; so if any legal exemptions are now made on the basis of the size of the holdings, even in the official records there would remain not a cent of land in the name of girijans.

Demand that control be in the girijans' hands, not officialdom's :

It is imperative that the village girijan committees alone have all powers to implement Regulation 1/70 and to determine the title of non-girijans who are self-cultivating the lands and are solely dependent on them. Regarding the implementation of Regulation 1/70, the girijans have decades of experience in submitting petitions to the officials and of the farce enacted by these officials in giving permission, 'investigating', and deciding. When schemes concerning the people are to be implemented, only the people must be relied on for implementing them. For schemes concerning particular sections of people, only those particular sections of people must be relied upon. The role of other forces should be one of extending necessary co-operation to the actual role and practice of those masses in implementing those schemes and of making them fruitful. Only when schemes are implemented through such application of the democratic principle can they be successful.

In Bhadravari and Seethampet areas of Srikakulam district, it was not because the government machinery did not know the actual facts that they did not act appropriately; it was only because those facts went against the class interests the Government serves. Thus, it was in the process of understanding the injustice done to them in practice that the girijans became conscious, got consolidated, and, without depending on the government machinery, took to united direct action to solve the problem of land under the occupation of landlords. The successive Governments and the State machinery then resorted to brutal attacks

against the girijans who were in action to solve the land problem on their own. The girijans, going through courts, jails, brutalities, and shedding much blood, did not however lose heart or determination. They took up the land seizure programme again after coming out of jail. Tempered by such experiences and many ups and downs, the girijans took control of the lands.

Considering all these experiences it becomes clear that, in the context of formulating demands, the girijans can be benefited only when the village girijan committees have all the powers to solve the land problem on the basis of Regulation 1/70. On the contrary, if the determination (of the poor non-girijan cultivating land by his own labour and dependent for his livelihood on it) is left to official certification, then the girijan will be reduced to begging mercy at the feet of the officers. In the villages where there are such poor non-girijans, the village girijan committees should give them their due place in the committees.

More treacherous step by Rama Rao government :

Notwithstanding the forementioned divergencies concerning the implementation of Regulation 1/70, as a result of the agitation conducted by the various organisations jointly as well as separately N.T.Rama Rao's ministry had to withdraw the scrapping of Regulation 1/70. But, at the same time, it resorted to a more treacherous step. On July 2, 1989, it announced as follows: Hereafter, non-girijans will not be allowed to purchase lands of the girijans in the scheduled areas. However, non-girijans may sell their patta lands to either the local non-girijans or to the Government. The state cabinet sent this proposal to the Governor for approval. Further, the state government suggested to the Central Government that, since there are no girijans at all in some of the areas declared as 'notified areas', these areas should be re-examined and 're-notified' by determining the actual number of girijans living there and the population ratio

existing there.

All this would amount to sanctifying the land transfers hitherto made to the non-girijans and legalising further transfers between non-girijans. It would constitute a fatal blow to the very existence of the girijans in the agency areas, who have a distinct culture and traditions and whose life pattern is intertwined with the forest wealth.

As a result of the policies of various governments regarding the agency areas, the girijan population is in any case decreasing there while the non-girijan population is increasing. According to official statistics, during 1971-81, the percentage of the girijans in the Agency areas came down from 50 per cent to 47 per cent. The manner of implementing the Regulation 1/70 is responsible for this. If there were to be no such opportunities for gaining possession of girijan lands, there would be no scope for such large numbers of non-girijans settling there. But, successive governments have been creating ample opportunities for them to do so. Now they are attempting to constrict the 'notified' areas by resorting to 're-notification'. As a court once commented while rejecting the appeals of the non-girijans: "The ongoing tussle between the girijans and non-girijans today is like a fight between a cripple, walking on one leg, and a man who is hale and hearty, with two strong legs". In those terms, taking out some areas from the hitherto 'notified' areas through 're-notification' amounts to breaking even that existing single leg.

As a part of the ongoing state-wide agitation against the cabinet decision, the Girijan Sangam in Bhadravari and Seethampet agency areas of erstwhile Srikakulam district took up an agitation against the scrapping of Regulation 1/70. The girijans of this region have had the experience of seizing lands through innumerable sacrifices and losing nearly 100 comrades in struggle. They know from experience that rights over land can be achieved through class struggle and consolidation

rather than constitutional protection. In spite of having in the past seized lands in this fashion, the girijans here are aware that they have to remain alert as long as the governments which attack the girijans in various forms continue to rule. While sufficiently understanding the useless nature of statutory protection, they have nevertheless vehemently protested against the scrapping of Regulation 1/70.

Meningitis epidemic :

While, on the one hand, the girijans were struggling with the Government's offensive, meningitis, a fatal disease, struck on a large scale in the Bhadravari and Seethampet agency areas. The medical team there worked tirelessly, but they were insufficient in numbers. After the meningitis had started, the Government failed to make arrangements to transport the patients in time, to set up a sufficient number of centres to treat the transported patients, and to provide sufficient quantities of medicines in accordance with the intensity and extent of the attack of the fatal disease. On April 11, 1989, the Member of Parliament from that area stated that, in that agency area alone, 250 people died, and that in a single small village 12 people died on single day. On the same day, the deputy minister at the Centre stated in Parliament that by March 31, 1989, 136 people had died of meningitis in Andhra Pradesh. §

§ In the same statement, the death toll from this disease in 1989 was given as: 185 in Bihar, 158 in Madhya Pradesh, 344 in Orissa, 109 in Maharashtra, 102 in Gujarat, and 58 in Delhi. It was also stated that in the earlier four years 8,000 people had so died in Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Delhi. The concerned minister, while mentioning that the National Institute of Communicable Diseases had already supplied 50,000 doses of anti-meningitis vaccine to Andhra Pradesh, and 45,000 doses of it to Madhya Pradesh, had revealed that the actual requirement of this vaccine was three lakh doses. One can imagine the Government's sense of responsibility from this revelation. The minister in the same breath "ruled out the indigenous manufacture of the vaccine since the quantity required was too small for commercial production"!

Unhygienic conditions, poor food habits and lack of resistance are the reasons for the attack of meningitis. Death occurs within 24 hours if treatment is not given on the appearance of the symptoms. Even if one escapes death with the treatment, the sickness continues to haunt one for about five years. Even if the treatment is given immediately, the brain, speech and eyesight may be damaged. With the attack of such a disease and with the rapid deaths thereafter, girijans in the agency areas were extremely agitated and scared. The Girijan Sangh cadres strove to assist the people by organising medical centres and by providing other facilities amidst the limitations there. It was as if the Government had thrown a challenge to the girijans to choose between laying down their lives in the class struggle for land, food and liberation in that region or, in their absence, with epidemics like meningitis.

Eighth girijan conference :

The girijans in these areas decided to discuss their problems and formulate tasks for their resolution again. It was in 1959 that the girijans of Bhadraviri and Seethampet regions started getting organised under the Girijan Sangham banner. Now, in 1989, it was already seven years since the seventh Girijan Conference. The girijans now got mobilised, again, to enlist membership for Girijan Sangham, to constitute village committees, and to hold the Eighth Girijan Conference on October 30, 1989. On the same occasion, they planned to complete the construction and inauguration of a stupa in memory of the martyrs who laid down their lives in the armed struggle in the erstwhile Srikakulam district. The martyrdom of Koranna and Manganna on October 31, 1967, in the face of landlord attacks on their way to a public meeting at Mondemkhal, had been a turning point for the Srikakulam girijan movement, and in its honour the girijans decided to inaugurate the memorial at Mondemkhal on October 31.

The Eighth Girijan Conference was held on October 30, 1989, with 1,000 girijan delegates from 120 villages. Fraternal delegates from Bihar and Orissa attended the conference. After the fraternal delegates had given their messages, the secretary's report was presented. It was discussed and passed by the conference. Resolutions aimed at resisting various attacks on the lives of girijans were duly discussed and passed. Later, the conference was concluded after electing the new executive.

On October 31, 1989, the memorial for martyrs was inaugurated. At the place of memorial 2,000 people gathered, sang revolutionary songs, and paid homage to the martyrs. Amidst revolutionary slogans and homages, the octogenarian communist revolutionary and prominent poet of Orissa, comrade Manmohan Mishra, inaugurated the memorial. Later a public meeting was held. After the fraternal delegates had spoken, the resolutions passed by the Eighth Girijan Conference were explained.

New Congress government's double-edged sword :

Parliamentary and A.P. assembly elections followed. Chenna Reddy, the new Congress chief minister, started giving statements expressing willingness to negotiate with Naxalites. He is now depicting the problem of 'Naxalites' as a problem only of the girijans. On the one hand, he lifted implementation of the Disturbed Areas Act, removed restrictions on public meetings, and allotted additional funds to agency areas; on the other hand, he wrote to the Central Government asking for contingents of the Central Reserve Police Force. The state government announced that anyone violating Regulation 1/70 would be imprisoned for more than a year. It issued an order that the instances of illegal occupations of land by non-girijans should be reported to the concerned police stations and SP or the DSP. It ordered the police authorities to place greater pressure on the police stations regarding such cases. It also told the

concerned officials that non-girijans holding girijans' land to the extent of 2.5 acres of wet land or 5 acres of dry land should not be evicted.

Anybody who generally understands the interests of the people knows that the 'Naxalite problem' means nothing other than the basic problems related to the present social set-up. Girijans' problems are only a part of those. But it is not just a 'girijan problem'. Even so, the present government, while pretending to strictly implement Regulation 1/70, announced exemptions to those holding 2.5 acres of wet lands or 5 acres of dry lands of the girijans. In instances of non-girijans holding more than that, entrusting the police with protection of the girijans' interests is like leaving goats to the care of wolves.

In the past, even under Congress governments (including that of Chenna Reddy) instructions were issued to encourage official laxity in the implementation of Regulation 1/70; exemptions were announced for those holding 5 acres of wet or 10 acres of dry land; declarations of disturbed areas were made; encounters were resorted to on a large scale. Today, too, the Government revealed its foresight and its real intentions when it asked the Central Government to send CRP even as it was making noble declarations. Exemptions to Regulation 1/70 and entrusting protection of girijans' interests to police will by no means solve the land problem. On the contrary, it will only strengthen the feudal hold.

The spate of announcements of concessions could well be due to the assessment that the activities of all the revolutionary groups in the agency areas do not pose any serious threat. They could well be due to the assessment that it is possible to create a breach in the activities of the revolutionaries, that they can be lured and thrown into oblivion. In this tussle, all the revolutionary groups will have to equip themselves with thorough-going revolutionary politics and ideological-political clarity and conviction, they will have to

evaluate the experiences gained and the policies followed till now.

The concrete forms of exploitation of girijans should be studied and noted, and the girijans should be made conscious, consolidated and mobilised against them. The problems of land and forest wealth are the basic problems of the girijans. The ruling classes and their governments, in employing different methods of exploitation to loot the land and forest wealth of the girijans, are taking advantage of girijans' backwardness and innocence as the principal tool. The girijans' liberation depends on countering the particular methods of loot that are being employed. The girijans have to be trained to effectively counter those methods of loot and to gain the ability for their own governance and control. Communist revolutionaries, who are dedicated to such tasks, will have to act with utmost proletarian political responsibility, without succumbing to subjective trends.

Communist revolutionary responsibility towards the girijans :

Particularly when working in agency areas, given the weak state of the State machinery and the forbearance of the girijans due to their backwardness and innocence, if with some effort, their problems are solved even partially, the girijans repose enormous confidence in the revolutionaries. But the basis of reposing such confidence is still in fact, their backwardness and innocence. Nevertheless, once they gain such confidence, some groups lose sight of their communist revolutionary political responsibilities and develop the feeling that their 'own' areas of work have been set up. With this they fail in carrying out the critical task of formally training the people themselves through their own political experience in class struggle. Due to the same failure, their activities do not develop in a manner that the revolutionary movement can get extended; nor are their activities such that people in other areas can feel their

relevance for finding solutions to their own problems.

At the same time, a situation is emerging where the groups are taking 'extension of the movement' to mean extension of their respective 'own' areas and are entering into areas considered to be the 'own' areas of other groups. This reflects an incorrect approach to mass struggle, mass organisation, and political struggle between the distinct lines represented by various groups. While the real jagirdar, the government, is being ignored or let off, a situation of clashes between groups and mutual killings is prevailing. All this is harmful to building and extending the revolutionary movement but is satisfying to the enemy. The revolutionary groups will have to come out of such tendencies wherever they are working and existing.

Jobs, bread, and private jets

"Vladimir Shoherbakov, chairman of the state committee for labour and social affairs, told TASS that about 30 million to 40 million Soviets might lose their jobs due to the economic reforms initiated by President Mikhail Gorbachev." (UNI, 5/9/90.)

"Tempers flared in bread stores as shortage beleaguered Mascoovites found for the first time in 25 years that they couldn't buy that staple of the Russian diet. 'That's Perestroika — we're not moving forward, we're going backward', said a 52 year old electrician..." (AP, 5/9/90.)

"Upto 20 new Russian 'millionaires' have been targeted to buy a Rolls Royce powered supersonic business jet..." (Daily Telegraph, 9/9/90)

Orissa :

Struggle of Koraput Adivasis and Building of a Mass Organisation

Land and forests have been two perennial issues for tribals anywhere in India for the past 150 years, since the British colonialists first brought about the Forest Act as part of their process of subjugating the rebel tribals and looting the riches from the forests. Five scheduled tribe districts of Andhra and two scheduled tribe districts (Ganjam and Koraput) of Orissa were, moreover, declared the 'Agency Area'. Thus it was around these two issues, of land and forest, that the tribals of the Agency Area rose time and again against the exploitation and repression by the Government and the trader-cum-usurers.

In the course of the tribals' mounting struggles, organisations have also sprung up. But due to certain weaknesses in their direction — ie, in their leadership — they could not continue their organisational and agitational activities. Though there are many external factors, too, responsible for such discontinuity — such as police and goonda repression, extermination of activists, and spreading of terror in struggle areas — the organisational weaknesses need to be examined in general terms, taking into account the concrete experiences of an Adivasi Sangh.

Issues of struggle :

First, the nature of the issues before the tribals should be made clear.

The Central Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission, in its first report, recently presented to the President of India seven years after the Commission's formation, has confessed about these:

"All tribal areas are full to the brim with discontent, particularly on the vital issues of land and forest. At some places, this has led to

confrontation with the Government, and there are rather frequent outbursts of violence. These people generally contribute on a major scale to the vast labour pool in the unorganised sector. But the wages paid to them in these sectors are very unlawful, scanty and completely contravening of our constitutional provisions."

On the dam projects being implemented in these areas, the Commission has commented:

"It is true that these areas are partially benefited. But the people living here are not benefited at all." (Indian Express, June, 26, 1939).

In addition to these four major issues observed by the Commission (viz, land, forest, wages, and frequent displacement), there is exploitation by traders, usury practised by both village sahlukars and co-operative institutions, 'legal' and illegal taxation or collection of 'penu' and bribes by government officials (including forest, police, revenue, health, tribal welfare, and block development), and health hazards including epidemics such as cholera, malaria, cerebral malaria, meningitis etc. In the face of such basic problems, it seems farfetched to mention the lack of other basic amenities and facilities such as education, drinking water, fair price shops, and supply of controlled goods.

Land :

The tribals of Koraput are mainly peasants. They have been earning their livelihood by putting in hard labour and cultivating the land for generations. But they do not have legal ownership rights over the land they till. Because of the poor quality of the land on the slopes of the hills they have to practise shift cultivation or 'podu'. But, according to the 1984 Forest Law and 1988 National Forest Policy, podu is classified, along with fuel and grazing of the cattle, as one of the causes of deforestation. These same laws make no mention, however, of the coup contract system or of the operation of innumerable saw mills -- the

major factors behind deforestation. The laws also do not mention the submergence of thousands of acres of forest land with the construction of multi-purpose and big dam projects. Yet the law takes a stringent view of the adivasis cultivating the forest land. Then what should they do for a living? How should they live if not by the land? The Government has no answer to this.

There are three categories of land in Koraput. They are: banjar, bush forest, and reserved forest. The tribal has no way to determine to which category his land belongs. The Forest Bill, however, specifies that bushy forests and reserve forests are properties of the Central Government. Hence the state government cannot give patta or confer ownership right to such lands. Since there is no proper survey of the forest land, and Government records quite simply show almost all the land as bushy forest and reserve forest, no banjar land is really available in the tribal areas for cultivation by the tribals. Thus the law denies the tribals' right to livelihood.

According to the government officials, then, the tribals -- by their very mode of sustenance -- are the law breakers, illegal citizens and criminals. They are thus abused, looted, jailed and even killed on any flimsy pretext. This is an essential aid to their exploitation. Hence the revenue officials, in the process of settlement and resettlement of land, have looted lakhs of rupees from poor tribals with promise of patta of the land they till. In Malkangiri subdivision, tribals of each village have paid Rs 30,000 to Rs 40,000 collectively, for the promised patta -- which is never in fact received. Tribals from some villages have even gone unitedly to gherao the tehsil office to demand back the money (which in the first place is extorted as a bribe from them) from the concerned officials. In some cases, they have managed to get it back.

Thus the general demand of the tribals, throughout Koraput district, has been ownership right over

the land they till. Though 90 per cent of the land under cultivation has not even been surveyed, it has been shown in official records as bushy or reserved land. Even tribals displaced by big dam projects — such as Machhkund, Balimela and Kolab — are rehabilitated merely with conditional pattas of unsurveyed land.

Forest :

The jungle issue is a related issue — the result of the fact that the adivasis live in the forests and cultivate forest land. There is continuous effort by forest officials to dispossess the tribals of their land by planting tree saplings there. Wherever the tribals are not organised, they are thus continuously driven to the upper slopes of the hills. The experience of the Bonda tribes is an instance of this. They have been driven to the tops of the hills, and they now have to fight back the officials with their arrows and bows. The Government treats them as a problematic ethnic case and has taken up the tactics of compromise to woo them. It has formed a development agency exclusively for them.

In Chitrakonda, Malkangiri, Ramgiri, Kalimela and Gunupur area, the struggle between the forest department and the tribals goes on over this. Another point of controversy is the right over the forest produce and the wage paid to tendu-leaf collectors. Other forest products, collected and processed with much labour by whole families of tribals, include mahua, tamarind, sal seed, tola, bhulia, kendu and many other medicinal roots and fruits. The prices paid for these, either by the contractor or the tribal development corporation are only a fraction of the necessary labour-time. If it is converted into a wage rate, considering all the labour input, this would amount to a meagre Rs 2 to Rs 3 per labourer per day. What is more, the adivasi, because of the ban on the movement of forest products, can not take his own collection of forest produce to the neighbouring market township to realise a higher rate.

Wages :

The adivasis generally contribute in a major way to the vast labour pool in the mines and industries sector. One can find them in under-paid jobs in the mines, the steel factory, the aluminium factory, and in almost all factories throughout Orissa. As contract labourers they work in contravention of all existing factory and trade union Acts at untenable rates. They are employed in these factories and mines through certain contractors.

The wages they are paid on these jobs are one-third or one-fourth of the legal minimum wages. Both the contractors and the factory owners (including the public sector enterprises) join hands in this heinous exploitation. The tribals are kept throughout their lifetime as casual workers in posts in which the nature of work is regular and permanent. They are not given any amenities such as quarters, education, and medical care. In the forest itself, they work in camps or under forest contractors, or even under the state forest department with still lower wages. Such wages vary between Rs 5 to Rs 15 per day, whereas a semi-skilled worker gets a minimum of Rs 50 in the organised sector.

Frequent displacement :

In the name of big dam projects and big factories (such as MIG and NALCO) a large number of tribal villages have been uprooted in Koraput district. Such big dam projects — Machhkund, Balimela, Kolab and Satiguda — have displaced more than 200 villages and 20,000 families (ie, about one lakh people) without proper rehabilitation or compensation. Even the scanty land allotted to them does not have proper legal status. Employment promised to the members of each such family has not materialised. Instead, hundreds of villages have been turned into islands inside the submerged area, and another lot of villages have turned dry because the natural stream of water to them has ceased to flow due to the dams. Recently,

construction of another big dam project, ie, Indrabati, has begun: and about forty villages on the banks of the Kapur river have turned dry. No rehabilitation colonies are even planned for the displaced people and no proper compensation is given -- on the plea that the land occupied by them belongs to the forest department.

Exploitation by traders :

As there is a ban on the movement of forest produce, the traders have a field day in the tribal areas. The government gives licences to different traders for different items of forest goods; a single trader getting a licence for a single item. In this way, trading monopolies are officially created. The Tribal Development Corporation have been turned into the worst kind of contract organisations by 'licensing' these items to them. The prices are thus dictated by the contractors, who pay only Rs 2 for mahua seeds and 20 to 25 paise for a kg of mahua flowers. The rate of other agricultural products, such as mandia, makki, rashi or til oil seeds, foodgrains and even vegetables are also determined by these traders' combine. To help them, the government never declares the prices of these products.

On the other hand, the controlled commodities supplied to these tribals (such as rice, sugar, kerosene etc) are looted by the combine of contractors and government officials at the point of issue itself.

In this manner, the tribals sell their produce at throw-away prices, and purchase their necessities at exorbitant rates.

Usurers :

These traders also play the role of usurers. They extort exorbitant interest through a primitive barter system of which the terms are loaded against the tribals. Local usurers practise the same at a fabulous rate. It sometimes amounts to Rs 400 per annum on Rs 100. The co-operatives and rural banks,

though they are supposed to provide subsidised loans, also extort high interest. The thumb-mark is taken but against it, practically nothing of actual cash or commodities goes into the hands of the tribals. The tribals then face the legal proceedings for non-repayment without having gained anything economically from the co-operatives. This is the outcome of the combine of co-operative officials and usurers. Thus the tribals have become victims of the worst type of usury, unknown earlier.

Collection of penu :

As illiteracy reigns supreme in this area (where the rate of literacy is about 5%), government officials ranging from the top brass to the lowest echelons extract money and materials from the tribals in the name of law. They collect penu or tax from them on every flimsy pretext for bricks, sand, grass, bamboo, woods, mahua, land and anything they can think up. They drag the unsubmitive tribal to the court to teach him a lesson and accuse him of a variety of false crimes. The revenue officials extract exorbitant bribes, with the promise of providing pattas.

The doctors, health workers and teachers are also no exception to this. The majority of teachers do not attend the schools but draw their salaries in connivance with the inspecting authorities. The residential ashram school teachers sell large amounts of the ration supplied for the students. They also get involved in the practice of usury. The doctors charge an exorbitant fee, knowing the life of the tribal patient is at stake. In Kalimela, recently, a tribal woman had to sell her only son to pay the doctor's fee for the autopsy of her dead husband's body -- without which autopsy, the authorities would not release the body. People die here, unrecorded deaths; the rate of mortality is very high due to malaria, meningitis, and a few other unknown diseases. The health authorities behave quite callously and never investigate these on the plea of scarcity of health centres.

Development of the Sangh :

A few examples will give an idea of the types of struggles waged by the Sangh.

The adivasi sangh in this region took formal shape 11 years ago (though its roots go much deeper). At that time, in the name of afforestation, the Government took over land in 40 villages. In response, adivasis took a number of meetings and rallies, culminating in a rally of over 10,000; and threw away the Government-planted seedlings; and resolved that no tribal cultivating his land would have his land taken in the name of afforestation. The struggle spread to around 200 villages in the region.

As mentioned earlier, since adivasis do not have proper legal titles -- pattas -- to the land they till, revenue officials extort money from them in the name of settling the pattas. In 1982, the tribals, under the Sangh's leadership moved into action against the officials, resorting in many places to gheraos in which the officials were forced to return the extorted amounts.

Similarly, the Sangh has moved from time to time against the arbitrary harassment of the adivasis. For example, five years ago, following the death of an old tiger, the forest officials held all the villagers of a particular village responsible, and kept them in custody. In response, villagers of over 60 villages surrounded the court where the adivasis were produced and the magistrate was forced to release them on their own bond.

In the recent period (1989-90) various issues relating to land have been taken up by the adivasis under the Sangh's banner. They have moved against a Land Mortgage Bank which uses the adivasis' innocence to practice usury on them. In another region, over five years, the adivasis struggled without the help of any leader or organisation against the forest officials, who used to attempt to snatch away the hill-slope land the adivasis had brought under cultivation. In the course of the struggle, villagers are repeatedly sent to jail;

when they come out, they resume the struggle. Now the Sangh itself is involved in this struggle.

This year, in five villages of another area, the social forestry department, with the help of the local officialdom, seized 150 acres of the land cultivated by adivasis. The Sangh organised a meeting where the adivasis resolved not to allow this. The next day, the adivasis collectively cultivated and sowed immediately. The forest and revenue officials came and attempted to stop them, but were helpless. After the ploughing, too, the adivasis did not let up their guard, but continued their meetings.

Future direction :

The struggle of the tribals' organisation in Koraput continues on the various issues mentioned above. Whenever a piece of land is snatched away by the forest officials for plantation, or when a revenue or co-operative official demands bribe from some illiterate tribal for leniency in applying some administrative or legal measures, the Sangh has protested through various forms of struggle.

But a regular campaign has not been started for their long-term programme -- such as for the right over land and forest produce, scrapping of the Forest Act 1984, fair prices for their produce, end of usury, and exposure of the true nature of Government's 'development projects' including of the co-operatives. Such a sustained campaign would have a tremendous educative effect on the common people in the villages. Formation of the Sangh at the village level has to be connected with such an active campaign. For then the people, with a clear political vision of themselves and of every instance of repression, exploitation and bribery inflicted on them, can effectively and continuously oppose the same. Such a common political vision can unify the tribals and make the village units routinely struggle-oriented. Through the protests and the struggles genuine unity will be forged

and, through the unity, the consciousness will be revised. The masses can apply their creativity collectively, giving birth thereby to various new ways and means of struggle. In the course of struggle with correct political leadership, the adivasis must gain the wider political consciousness necessary for setting up their own control and governance.

Tasks of the second phase :

At the same time, the Adivasi Sangh has to think of the non-tribal refugees living among the tribals. As a class, they are friendly; that is to say they are poor peasants and labourers. While the rehabilitated adivasis (displaced by the Machkund and Balimela dam projects) got seven acres each, the non-tribals refugees, who had been earlier thrown out by war or communal riot from their own homeland, had been living among the tribals with only five acres of land per family for 20 to 30 years. They have, of course, a feeling of being the 'outsiders' who have to pass through untold misery. But the tribals know them pretty well. Nowhere do they exploit or harass the tribals. On the contrary, they work shoulder to shoulder with the tribals, bearing the brunt of the same prepression and exploitation by the new sahu-kars. The Sangh should try to mobilise the non-tribals into its fold and give them the self-respect that comes in the process of struggling for the common cause. There are about 600 such non-tribal colonies. The population of each colony varies from 1,000 to 4,000.

However, while dealing with this vast number of people belonging to different linguistic and cultural groups, the Sangh has to bear in mind the peasant backwardness, the lack of political vision, and the sense of a loss of identity and belonging.

This mobilisation can be a task of the second phase; but it is a necessary task. Living among the tribals, and belonging to their class, they cannot be ignored or left out of the ambit of our

organisation.

Another task of the second phase is the building of a district-level tribal organisation. The Sangh, in the process of struggle, has to extend its sphere, co-ordinate with other block or sub-division level tribal organisations fighting for the same cause and with the same revolutionary orientation. This is a difficult task as it requires more strength, patience and tactfulness in terms of organisational dealing.

At the same time, organisational and agitational activities at the area level must be kept sharply in focus. Otherwise, in the process of nurturing a broader area, the main area gets weakened.

Tribals' place in the class structure of India :

Such a process helps the growth of a mature leadership. Struggle is not a new word for the tribals of Koraput. The struggle of the Koraput girijans is as old as the Srikakulam struggle. It has the glory of being led by leaders such as the poet-cum-revolutionary, Subbarao Panigrahi, Vempatapu Satya Narayana, P. Krishna Murthy, and Purushottam Pali. But why is there no organisational growth? Why is there a vacuum in the line of the local leadership?

The glories of the past do not build up an organisation. It is built by a correct leadership capable of providing clear political vision to the people. Apart from concentrating upon the factors mentioned earlier, (whereby a continuous consolidation of class consciousness takes place in the form of a sustained, organised, and united movement of the tribals) it is also necessary to connect the tribals' struggle with the struggles of other classes of people — viz, the working class and other sections of the peasantry. In the overall frame of the people's democratic revolution, the tribals have to become conscious of their place in the overall social and political context, and their relation to the other exploited revolutionary classes.

The tribals are basically peasants by class. Their difference from the plains area peasants lies in the fact that, apart from the agrarian laws promulgated to foster feudalism, they are being oppressed by another draconian law — viz, the Forest Act. Beginning from the colonial rule of the 19th century, this law has passed through various amendments to its latest shape in 1984, and National Forest Policy of 1987, in which the tribal's right over any land or produce of the forest has been denied. His age-old use of the forest, is now made a criminal act. He has been made an intruder on his own land. He lives now in his village at the mercy of the Government. Even the forest animals have more rights than he has in the sense that they are protected by law from the hunters. In this way, the tribal peasant is exploited many times more than the plains area peasants.

In a manner of speaking the forest authorities appear before the tribals as new feudal lords, much more oppressive than the landlords of plains area. The old sahuakar appears before them in the robes now of the new co-operative officials — with all their illusory tribal development and poverty alleviation schemes.

In this fashion, the common causes of the poor peasants and the tribals have to be identified.

Establishing proletarian leadership :

Similarly, the proletariat being the most conscious and revolutionary class, the common cause and the connection between its position and interests and those of the tribals in the revolution have to be concretely exhibited and worked out in terms of a revolutionary programme in which the leadership of the proletariat is established. That the proletariat and the tribals are allies in a revolutionary change of the society, has to be shown and programmatically practised. This is not a new experience for the tribals, because in the seventies, a section of the worker-leaders from

Chitrakonda working in the Balimela Dam Project tried to do this. In the face of State repression on their union the main leadership came underground to the tribal villages and tried to organise the and build up struggles.

Apart from this, immediately and more specifically, the politics behind all the dam projects taken up in Koraput at the cost of its people's livelihood, the interests therein of the financing institutions such as the World Bank, the role of imperialists, and the process of looting of the minerals from Koraput through a network of compradors (such as NALCO in Damanjodi, Ferro Alloys in Visham Cuttack, M.I.G. of Sunabeda, and the Rayagada Paper Mills and Mangal Timbers of the Birlas) have to be explained. The retrenched workers from various projects and factories (such as Seva Paper Mill and Ferro Alloys) in Koraput alone are more than 35,000. Apart from them, there are the sub-merged-area people of Kolab, Indravati, etc, totalling more than one lakh people. In the name of development, how the forest land gets submerged and tribals are turned into beggars -- without any concrete rehabilitation scheme — is the aspect that has to be studied and concretely explained. A common connecting thread must run through all the burning issues faced by the Adivasi Sangh.

By this process alone can the Sangh mature, gather strength and speed, and grow into a tornado.

West Bengal :

Peasants' Struggle against CPM-Landlord Oppression

Debra is the southern part of Midnapur north sub-division in Midnapur district of West Bengal. Having plain fertile lands with mainly paddy cultivation, it differs from the northern part (Salboni, Garbhota, Goaltore) of the sub-division comprising forest and unirrigated rocky lands. Parts of Debra are well irrigated but often affected by floods. Here peasants suffer from low wages for agricultural labour, harassment of tenants, and usury. There is often a tense situation at the time of harvesting between the landlords and rich peasants on one side and middle and poor peasants on the other side.

Influences of militant national movement and communist movement are still there among the peasantry. Debra was a centre of the militant food movement in 1965-66 and along with Gopiballabhpur was a stronghold of the peasant movement under the influence of the historic Naxalbari peasant revolt. Communist revolutionaries from Debra were among the first in West Bengal to differ with, and demarcate from, the Left adventurist line of Charu Mazumdar. But owing to largescale repression and disorganisation in the Communist revolutionaries later, the peasant struggles have been at a low ebb. Due to repeated political-organisational setbacks and accompanying weaknesses, efforts that were started in the early eighties to re-organise the peasantry under a peasant association have not yet led to a well-knit and dynamic peasant organisation. Nevertheless the activists of the peasant association have been maintaining living contacts with the peasantry and leading various local but militant struggles of peasants over problems of fair distribution of vested lands, water and against various forms of oppression by the landlord-CPI(M) combine.

One aspect of the revolutionary mass work in this region is that of its relation with the Jharkhand movement. Debra has a considerable Adivasi population — about 12% of the total population — more concentrated in some villages. They have a deep-rooted urge for the preservation, identity and development of their culture and language, and Debra is a peripheral zone of the movement for a separate Jharkhand state. Jharkhand Liberation Front and Jharkhand Party have some influence among Adivasi people here. These groups too, like other Jharkhand groups, speak of and take up problems like land and rights over forest produce etc, only occasionally. Their main drive is just for formation of a separate state within the confines of the present socio-political setup. Besides, all these groups often engage in factional fights among themselves for supremacy.

Even so, the social chauvinist propaganda against the Jharkhand movement and the social repression carried on by CPI(M), aggravate the already pent-up feelings of Adivasi people and drive them more and more into the Jharkhand fold. But the Adivasi masses, even in the face of chauvinist propaganda, retain their secular nature and fight shoulder to shoulder with their Bengali brethren, against harassment and oppression by the landlord-CPI(M) combine.

In outlook and programme, the peasant association differs from the Jharkhand groups fighting for a separate state, and does not have any formal relations with any of them. At the same time they maintain fraternal relations with the rank and file and followers of Jharkhand movement. Whenever there is a struggle of these sections on any social, cultural or economic issue, the peasant association actively supports them. It firmly opposes the chauvinist propaganda and acts of repression by CPI(M) and others on these sections. For the specific purpose of opposing repression by CPI(M)-landlord combine the peasant association joined hands with Jharkhandi ranks to form a "Daman-Peeran Birodhi Committee". While maintaining fraternal

relations and supporting any specific just struggles, the peasant association activists explain the futility of the demand for a separate state within the framework of present set-up to the ranks of Jharkhand groups. They explain to them and stress the need for organising democratic revolutionary class struggles of the people on the problems of land, irrigation, rights over forest produce etc, and against feudal exploitation and oppression. They explain to the ranks of Jharkhand groups that struggles on issues such as development of culture, language etc, can acquire real strength only when they are organised in close link with and as a part of democratic revolutionary struggles on basic socio-economic problems. On its own too, the peasant association is trying to build class unity between Adivasi and non-Adivasi masses in the course of various struggles.

One particular feature of mass work and struggles in these regions is that they, from the onset itself, are invariably faced with aggressive opposition from CPI(M). Notwithstanding their namesake legislative measures and propaganda about protecting the rights of tenant peasants and rural poor, the CPI(M), particularly after coming to power again in 1977, progressively aligned itself in practice with major sections of landlords and rich peasants. Using their position in the government and panchayats, they disburse official relief (allocation of house-sites, food for work, etc) in an arbitrary and partisan manner, only to those peasants who, though out of compulsion, lend their services to promote the sectarian political interests of CPI(M). The CPI(M) uses these sections of peasants and youth thus bought over to mob and muffle any opposition to their policies and practices, be it from struggling people or be it from political activists. In addition to this, like any other ruling class party in power, the CPI(M) controls and uses the police and administration against political dissent and the struggling masses. Through all this and under cover of Marxist jargon the CPI(M) is acting

like a social fascist gang. Today any attempt by the people to better their living conditions and any attempt by revolutionaries to reorganise the revolutionary peasant movement cannot advance without politically isolating the CPI(M), without preparing for self-defence and without preparing the people for a militant opposition to the authoritarianism and bullying by CPI(M). The following are only a few recent instances which stress this need.

Abdalipur West

Abdalipur Mouza in Debra thana, with a population of four hundred, of which more than 50% are adivasis, had some vested lands. There have been some costly trees on these lands. The village poor have been urging that they be allowed to construct their huts on these lands. But some peasants patronised by CPI(M), forcibly felled the costly trees on these lands and constructed huts for themselves.

The labouring people of the village protested against this arbitrary act and approached the peasant association organiser for guidance in their struggle. They were advised to hold a meeting of all the people of the village, discuss the problem of said lands and commonly decide on the method of distribution among all needy peasants irrespective of their party affiliations.

The Anchal Pradhan, who is a local leader of the CPI(M), tried to stall the meeting and tried to mislead the peasants by saying that the said lands are already settled in favour of some Alok Kendra Trust. On an enquiry from the office of junior land Revenue Officer, by a common decision of the peasants, the CPI(M) leader's lie was exposed and it is established that the lands are vested lands. Even after that, the CPI(M) people did not stop their arbitrary encroachment on the land.

In the face of this, the peasants organised themselves and en masse went to occupy the lands. The CPI(M) people beat a retreat and agreed to resolve

the problem through a common decision of the meeting of all peasants as earlier proposed by the peasant organiser. Thus these lands could be finally distributed equally among all needy peasants irrespective of their party affiliations.

The CPI(M) leaders were infuriated with this democratic assertion by the peasants and started harassing them. They cut off water to the lands of some peasants, violating an existing agreement between those peasants and the owner of the shallow pump. When the peasants protested against this and demanded the restoration of water supply, the CPI(M) leaders resorted to divisive tactics (asking the affected peasants to come forward individually) to make representation. Again, it is only with the collective struggle of the peasants, threatening to destroy the shallow, that the peasants could win back the water supply to their fields. Then CPI(M) leaders continued to harass peasants individually by imposing a fine of Rs. 501 on a Jharkhand supporter on the charge that he had abused somebody at the time of elections; by preventing another peasant from harvesting the mustard crop; by removing yet another peasant from his job; etc. The peasants could retaliate all such arbitrary acts of harassment so far, through strengthening unity and mutual help among themselves and through united struggle. The overwhelming majority of the people are fast realising the significance of their organised strength and gaining confidence in the peasant association.

Itai Village

In the late fifties and early sixties, a landlord, amassing more than two hundred acres of land, was harassing the peasants. In the wake of Naxalbari movement the peasants here waged an organised militant struggle and succeeded in establishing their tenancy rights on the lands of this landlord. But following the CPI(M) government's repression on the peasant movement in the late sixties and taking advantage of the imprisonment of the peasant

organiser here, the landlord evicted the rightful tenants from these lands with the help of CPI(M). The peasant organiser was released after ten years.

Again people got organised for struggle to repossess their tenancy rights over these lands. There was a seven and a half acre tank, known as Gardan Mari Tank, in these lands. The landlord in liaison with CPI(M) has been resorting to underhand methods to frustrate the peasants' struggle for the re-possession of these lands. The landlord and CPI(M) also hatched a conspiracy to transfer the Gardan Mari Tank in the name of one of CPI(M) supporters, at some price. The CPI(M) people, saying that the tank land was already transferred to somebody, threatened the peasants with dire consequences if they did not keep off these lands.

The peasants kept constant vigil and started preparations for struggle. On the one hand, they made representations to the Block Development Officer, Junior Land Revenue Officer, and even to the police. But they did not depend on this. They held secret meetings in the village and carefully planned to occupy the tank en masse, with due preparations for self-defence. Accordingly, about 400 people armed with the traditional weapons, got mobilised and occupied the tank. They made a division of work among themselves: While some peasants cleaned the tank and sowed paddy, others stood guard to key points to ward off any attack from CPI(M) gangs.

On report and instigation by CPI(M), a police force arrived on the scene. They tried to prevent the peasants from cleaning the tank and sowing the paddy. The peasants stood their ground and carried on their work. They refused to budge under threats from police and were prepared to defend themselves. The police had to come down and plead with peasants to come to a negotiated settlement with the landlord and the CPI(M) persons. The peasants then and there gave a petition to the police, while agreeing to come to the police station afterwards.

The next day, on the advice of the peasant

organiser, the peasants went en masse to the police station. They explained their position and while informing about their readiness for a negotiated settlement (financial) with the landlord for taking the ownership of the tank, demanded of the police that they should not interfere. They refused to leave possession of the tank under any circumstances meanwhile.

Left with no option, the landlord finally agreed to negotiation. An agreement was reached to transfer the tank for a certain agreed amount. Thus, through the collective and organised struggle by the majority of the people of the village, 35 needy peasants (from all communities — Adivasi, Hindu, and Muslim) won the ownership of the tank from the landlord.

The CPI(M) leaders were not reconciled. They made a last-ditch effort to browbeat the peasants. On a day when nearly 300 peasants (including some from neighbouring villages) gathered near the tank and were celebrating their victory, the CPI(M) leaders made attempts to attack the peasants. They mobilised an armed gang of their followers and advanced menacingly towards the peasants, some of whom were returning to their houses after cleaning the tank and celebrating with the tortoise and fish caught in the tank. Seeing the CPI(M) gangs' advance, the peasants regrouped and were ready to defend themselves. The CPI(M) gang returned, only to come again with a bigger mob. But by then the peasants sent out signals to neighbouring villages by blowing horns.

A large number of peasants rallied and surrounded the CPI(M) mob from three sides. Scared of this, the CPI(M) mob fled for their life.

Maratala

Similarly, at Maratala, near here, Satyapur Mouza has many vested lands. Poor peasants have been agitating for their distribution. They erected their huts on these lands and have been living there. But their dwellings were not recorded.

Peasants made appeals to the officials, gave money to CPI(M) touts as demanded, but nothing happened. The CPI(M) followers were trying to usurp these lands. With the help of the peasants association organiser, the peasants held a meeting in the village, discussed the problem, and started an agitational programme.

One day, when the peasants took out a procession to Maratala, local leaders of CPI(M) started abusing the peasants. They beat up a processionist. With this tension grew. Many peasants gathered and retaliated CPI(M)'s attack. On the next day, when a large number of peasants held a protest rally again against CPI(M)'s bullying, the CPI(M) gangs attacked the rallyists with lathis and arrows and threw bombs. The enraged rallyists made an organised retreat, allowed the CPI(M) gangs to exhaust their arms and then made a counter-attack. The CPI(M) gangs fled. Using their power the CPI(M) foisted cases against the peasants. There is some lull now. But the peasants have not lost their confidence and are preparing for struggle again.

Such struggles, as above, have their own political and revolutionary significance. Through them, the peasants are getting disillusioned with pseudo-Marxists. They are learning to fight CPI(M)-landlord domination and bullying. But they are still of a sporadic and isolated nature. By themselves they cannot develop into an agrarian revolutionary movement. For this strenuous and organised revolutionary efforts are necessary. First and foremost reorganising and strengthening the Peasants Association on the basis of a broad revolutionary programme is an urgent task. For this ground level preparations — organising village-level meetings of peasants; working out immediate and long-term demands that can unite all revolutionary sections of peasants in the villages; election of village-level committees; conducting agitational programmes on immediately pressing demands; making organisational preparations for a conference etc; are necessary. Peasants association activists in different villages are working in this direction.