

Editorial

CPRCI (ML) --

A Communist Consolidation That Holds Promise

It is mostly known by now, at least to the revolutionary circles in India, that four communist revolutionary organisations -- namely, CCRI; CPI (ML) - C.T ; CUCI (ML); and MLOC -- have recently merged into a single body named CPRCI (ML). The four organisations involved in the unification had already issued a unity-declaration some months ago. So the ideological-political basis and intent of unification expressed in that declaration have now fructified in their actual organisational merger. This achievement of unification is the fruit of prolonged collective effort and expectation of all the Party forces involved. It has naturally gladdened and enthused them as well as the advanced sections of the revolutionary mass movement under their influence. There seems, however, to be a mixed reaction to this development from other sections of the communist revolutionary camp.

A segment of communist revolutionaries have been gracious enough to welcome this development as a positive and happy event. Out of this segment, the larger portion comprises those comrades who would welcome any unification whatsoever in the commu-

... revolutionary camp. They are so fed up with and frustrated by the seemingly never-ending state of fragmentation of the communist revolutionary movement in India that they would rather bear with a bad unification than endure the existing state of affairs. They are thus reflecting only the pressing objective need of consolidation of communist revolutionary forces and proper reorganisation of the Party, for providing effective revolutionary leadership to the mass struggles of the Indian people. The other, relatively more enlightened, portion of the segment comprises those comrades who welcome a unification insofar as it promotes further organisational consolidation and crystallization of any particular ideological-political trend in the communist revolutionary movement. They realise that the more exactly the polarisation and realignment of forces take place around definite ideological-political trends, the better it is for a consistent political practice and for getting a clear picture of the real ideological-political problems which need to be overcome, in order to pave the way for comprehensive unification of the Party forces.

On the other hand, there are also a few quarters in the communist revolutionary camp who have received the emergence of CPRCI (ML) with a certain unease, even with a certain consternation. Leaving aside the elements of biased approach and unfraternal attitude which do not deserve serious consideration here, the only plausible reason for such a negative reaction to unification can be the misinformed belief that it has adversely affected the

unity-prospects of any other section or organisation of communist revolutionaries. In fact, the specific process of unification, leading to the emergence of CPRCI (ML), has not pre-empted the probable unification of any of the concerned four organisations with some other section or organisation of communist revolutionaries: Prior to this unification, all of the four organisations had, on their own, explored the unity-prospects in every probable case. As a result, each of them had come to the conclusion that, for the time being, there existed no principled or sufficient basis for it to unite with any communist revolutionary organisation other than the specific organisations involved in this unification. This fact indicates that there is no valid ground for any such quarter to react negatively to the emergence of CPRCI (ML); whether the negative reaction be transparent or under the cover of a posture of indifference to this development.

A principled unification of communist revolutionary forces is always, to a lesser or greater extent, a significant development; because, as mentioned earlier, it would be beneficial to the advancement of the process of Party-reorganisation, directly or indirectly. The need and significance of such a unification presents itself more sharply in the context of the current international and national situation.

Driven by the ever-deepening crisis of world-imperialism and its neo-colonial order, the reactionary rulers worldwide have tremendously geared up their attacks on the livelihood, meagre social claims,

democratic rights, and organised strengths of the people of all lands. That is more so in the case of the people of the underdeveloped oppressed countries. Today, the socialist States who would check the imperialist forces of aggression and war from going berserk are no longer there. Earlier, the state of military confrontation between the two imperialist superpowers would make them circumspect in their international conduct, for there would be uncertainty and risks involved in any miscalculated venture on their part. But today such a state of military confrontation does not exist. These factors, and the associated developments in national liberation movements, have made the imperialist powers quite brazenfaced and arbitrary in their aggressive conduct towards the oppressed countries.

Here, in India, various comprador bourgeois-landlord political parties and their governments as well as the revisionist ones, are feverishly engaged in translating the current imperialist offensive into concrete misery and suppression of the broad masses of Indian people. As a result, the process of intensification of social contradictions and accumulation of social tensions has acquired a new momentum. Coupled with that, there is the critical depletion of political credibility of the ruling classes' political parties and State-institutions. This they are seeking to compensate with increasing reliance on administrative measures for handling all expressions of people's resentment and protest as also with increasing reliance on divisive and diversionary politics. These two elements go

into making a volatile and explosive political situation which presents tremendous objective scope for the quicker advance of the democratic revolutionary movement of Indian people, including the growth of communist revolutionary forces.

Yet, the Indian ruling classes are managing to manipulate, bulldoze and muddle their way through the precarious state of affairs of their economy and rule, taking benefit of the chronically deficient political core of the Indian revolutionary movement -- namely, the underdeveloped and unconsolidated state of the Party forces. So much so that the reactionary Indian rulers and their imperialist overlords are able, for the time being, not only to save their own skin from the full blast of the pent-up and swelling rage of the suffering masses of the Indian people but also to encroach upon the various vantage grounds available to the people as the fruits of the hard-fought popular struggles over the past decades. In conjunction with the reactionary political-economic onslaught, the Indian ruling classes are employing, against the organised as well as ordinary sections of the people, physical violence of unusual scale, range, and intensity -- State terrorism or State-sponsored terrorism, Mafia-terrorism, communal-fascist terrorism, feudal-casteist terrorism and so on. So, the revolutionary forces are facing the indispensable requirement of leading the masses of people in effective resistance to the current reactionary onslaught, not only to make significant advances but even to hold their ground. Thus the ruthless logic of the developing

situation is almost making compulsory the long-standing task of developing and consolidating the Party-forces so as to consummate the process of Party-reorganisation.

It is not by chance, then, that the communist revolutionary camp has undergone, in the recent period, an unmistakable change of climate in favour of unity. These days, the unity-wind has begun to prevail over the wind of fragmentation in the communist revolutionary camp. That is borne out by the recent evidence of three major currents of serious unity-endeavour around definite ideological-political trends, including the proletarian revolutionary trend which is now chiefly embodied in the CPRCI(ML). Actually, all of these unity currents are in one way or another echoes of the logic of the developing objective situation in the realm of conscious activity of communist revolutionary forces.

The special significance of the particular unification process that resulted in the emergence of CPRCI(ML) may not be quite apparent to one and all, at least immediately. The Party forces consolidated therein are not very large in number. Even the extent of the revolutionary mass movement under their influence is not outstanding. For that matter, more than one existing communist revolutionary formations have bigger, if not better, claims on that count. Yet the CPRCI(ML) is the best bet, at present, for carrying forward and consummating the process of communist unification and Party-reorganisation, as well as for laying firm foundations to build the revolutionary alternative to the

political organisation and power of the reactionary ruling classes.

This unification has facilitated better understanding and more comprehensive expounding of the proletarian revolutionary line. Assimilated in that process is the cherished legacy of uncompromising ideological struggle against various opportunist currents and deviationist trends. That means that the ideological struggle which various constituents of CPRCI(ML) waged earlier on their own and in their respective historical circumstances has now been commonly owned and its substance incorporated in the common line. By thus holding aloft the proletarian revolutionary line, the CPRCI(ML) have promoted the prospects of consolidation of more Party forces around this line in due course of time. Of course, in this matter much depends upon how well and soon the CPRCI(ML) is able to implement that line and project it among the Party forces at large. In a more specific sense, much depends upon how well and soon the CPRCI(ML) is able to implement and project the kernel of its ideological orientation, reflecting its grasp of the essence of the twin tasks of building the Party and building the revolutionary movement. That is, the building of the Party is, essentially, its ideological-political building; and building the revolutionary mass movement is, essentially, building the revolutionary political consciousness of the masses.

Further, this unification has brought the Party-questin into sharp focus. It has not only emphasized the pressing need and crucial significance of the Party-reorga-

nisation for bringing about a new high-tide in the Indian revolutionary movement but also projected the *line-based* approach to Party-reorganisation. Applying to the concrete process of Party-reorganisation the general orientation of essentially building the Party ideologically-politically, this unification has squarely placed the problem of Party-reorganisation in the context of the level of development and establishment of the proletarian revolutionary line. Similarly, it has highlighted the other facet of the Party-question, namely the impermissibility of diluting the distinct ideological-political identity of the Communist Party. This unification seeks to maintain such distinction not only from all the ruling classes' political forces but also from non-proletarian revolutionary political forces who are allies of the proletariat in the given stage of revolution, and even from the backward layers of the proletarian masses who have not acquired revolutionary class consciousness. The CPRCI(ML)'s insistence on the distinct ideological-political identity of the Party, while seeking to build the Party as the leading political core of the revolutionary mass movement of the Indian people, has not only general orientational validity but also particular relevance to the present situation.

At present, on the one hand, the all-out ideological offensive of the international bourgeoisie against Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought and socialism is concentrated on the role of the Communist Party as the vehicle of the revolutionary hegemony of the proletariat,

before and after winning State-power. On the other hand, under conditions of profound political crisis and utter political discredit of mainstream political parties and institutions of Indian ruling classes, the broad masses of Indian people yearn for some revolutionary alternative. They instinctively seek the revolutionary political party as the king-pin of the revolutionary political alternative. In seeking the revolutionary party, they are not after the formal aspect but the political content of the revolutionary Party. So, those who wittingly or unwittingly short-change the people by formally proclaiming to be such a revolutionary party, without being equipped with firm, consistent, effective revolutionary politics, or those who are themselves tentative or uncertain about their politics, cannot offer what the struggling masses of the people require: certainness of political views, course of action, and ultimate victory; revolutionary responsibility towards the people; revolutionary politics corresponding to people's own experience of revolutionary practice.

By bringing together Party forces with varying historical backgrounds, struggle-experiences, organisational training, and practices, this unification has presented a valuable opportunity and formidable challenge before the CPRCI(ML)'s rank and file, the leadership in particular, to practically furnish the proper solution to the inner-party struggle -- a problem that for long has been defying an impressive positive experience. The unification has provided the basic requirements for successful tackling of this problem. Basic

unanimity is there on the ideological-political-organisational line. The necessary ideological clarity, methodology, and organisational mechanism are available in the organisational line, with special reference to the whole set of views pertaining to the process of unification of communist revolutionary forces and reorganisation of the Party. Any possible insufficiency, in the basic framework and conditions available for tackling the inner-party struggle, can come to light only in the actual course of its tackling. So, apart from the fact that the past history shows a dismal record in this matter and the fact that all the non-proletarian and non-revolutionary influences, sentiments, and attitudes generally find concentrated expression in the realm of inner-party struggle, no other tangible odd is weighing against the successful conduct of such struggle in the CPRCI(ML).

Nevertheless, success in effectively solving the inner-party struggle, at the practical plane, will prove to be an additional feather in the cap of the CPRCI(ML). That will add to the lustre of the other distinctive features of the ideological orientation of CPRCI(ML) -- namely, on the Party question and on the revolutionary mass line -- reflecting the basic strength of its proletarian revolutionary line. The time ahead seems to hold great promise for CPRCI(ML)'s thriving and the CPRCI(ML) holds great promise for accomplishing the task of Party reorganisation and the task of building the political revolutionary alternative to the existing State system.

UNITEDLY RESIST THE CURRENT IMPERIALIST OFFENSIVE!

STRIVE FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE!

-- Statement of the C.O.C., CPRCI(ML), concerning the Bharat Bandh on September 29, 1994

Comrades and Friends,

Various mass organisations of the working people, the youth and women have jointly given the call for a Bharat Bandh on September 29, 1994. The proposed all-India mass action is focussed against the Government of India's accession to the new GATT Treaty and its impending ratification by January 1995. The Government of India has taken this course in utter disregard of the national interests of the Indian people and their widely expressed opposition to it. The bandh-call in protest against that course is a justified action. It should not be ignored by the conscious revolutionary forces and other patriotic elements on account of the poor credentials of its main political sponsors, i.e., the pseudo-Left parliamentary parties such as the CPI(M), CPI, etc. Notwithstanding the motives of its main political sponsors, the proposed mass action, in fact, would be an important and concerted manifestation of the current anti-imperialist protest movement of the Indian people -- a movement that has been provoked by the

ultimate settlement of the issue!

No doubt, the successful leader of the Kanoria workers' struggle -- the SSU -- has become stronger through this victory, both in respect of its prestige and the actual strength of the conscious and organised following, and it is more capable of dealing with the new moves and intrigues of its detractors and the new offensives of the mill management. But there is no reason to be complacent. There is every likelihood of the management going back on its promises, once it succeeds in disposing of the products lying in the factory (worth crores of rupees). And there is every likelihood that the so-called 'established unions' may come forward with new conspiracies and intrigues for avenging their loss of face and for undermining the authority of the SSU, established through this factory. But, given the vigilance, unity in ranks, and fighting spirit the Kanoria workers have been exhibiting under the leadership of the SSU, there is no reason for alarm.

(The above piece was written before the fresh confrontations and police attack that took place less than a week after the mill's re-opening. -- Editor)

Orissa

Malkangiri Adibasi Sangh Advances to a New Phase of Struggle

-- by a correspondent

I. *How they celebrated May Day*

This year, continuing the practice established in the last two years, the Malkangiri Adibasi Sangh celebrated May Day jointly with the workers of an important working class centre of Malkangiri district, Orkel. (Malkangiri was earlier part of Koraput district, Orissa.) The rally was held successfully, with the participation of about 5,000 tribals and about 500 workers, but it did not come about without difficulty.

This was the first rally to be held by the Sangh at Orkel, and there were few contacts with the workers there. Orkel is actually a stronghold of reactionary forces, particularly the BJP and Congress, who find a base among the sizeable trader sections, officers, contractors, certain corrupt employees, and so on. There has hardly been any progressive movement here, despite the ritual activities of CPI and IPF, and May Day has been more or less reduced to a feast day. Hence, when the Sangh came to the town's unions with a proposal for a joint rally, discussion among the union leaders centred around what type of food to serve, and proposals were floated to hold the rally in the Jagannath Mandir.

Returning from this planning meeting with the union leaders, the Sangh activists were cursing their organisers for the idea of a joint rally. Is this the proletariat that is going to lead us, they wondered.

In explaining patiently the reason for the decision, the leadership reminded the activists of the earlier experience in these May Day celebrations.

Working class of Malkangiri

The Sangh is working in a region where there are sizeable numbers of workers -- particularly at Balimela dam project (Chitrakonda), Orkel powerhouse, Poteru dam project, the Dandakaranya project, Satiguda irrigation project, electricity workers and employees, etc. The workers of Poteru dam project (under construction) and Balimela have a combined strength of over 4,000. It has been an important task of the Sangh and of revolutionary forces to demonstrate the common interests of the workers in this region and the tribals, and to show how the struggle of each can be strengthened by the other.

The workers of Balimela have a glorious history. After the split from CPI(M), communist revolutionary comrades of border regions of A.P. and Orissa chose this area to develop a working class base. The workers in their thousands (when the project was under construction the strength was over 15,000) had put up great militant battles, and had endured many sacrifices. It was the leading workers of Balimela that had gone underground to organise the tribals of the surrounding

villages, and thus had become among the main accused in the Chitrakonda Conspiracy Case. It would be wrong to ignore this history.

However, by 1984 the Balimela union had become inactive. Not only the earlier experience of repression, but the wrong politics of more recent leadership too, had rendered them a demoralised lot. There was no union office and no regular activity. The cultural level of even the erstwhile leaders had sunk low.

The first tasks set in 1988-89, when a planned effort was made to reorganise, were to begin regular functioning of the union, and to set up a union office. At the same time, Balimela workers took the initiative to form an All-Orissa Big Dam Project Workers Federation (other big dam projects in the state include Indrabati, Upper Kolab, Subarnarekha, Rengalli, and Samal). Some Federation meetings were kept at the Balimela office. The main demand of the Federation is the regularisation of workers, the utilisation of all the machinery belonging to the dam authorities (instead of hiring of contractors), and the abolition of the contract and subcontract system.

With the attempts to regularly function the union, the taking up of many big and small issues, and with the morale-boosting of the Federation formation, workers of Balimela once again began to get enthused. Meanwhile the spread and growth of the Malkangiri Adibasi Sangh was also giving a fillip to the workers. The workers lent innumerable types of support to the Sangh. They would help the Sangh in material ways, as well as in mobilisation.

Worker-peasant rally

In 1992, the leadership of the Sangh and the Balimela workers felt it was important to have a joint display of strength at Chitrakonda. The workers were mobilised to raise demands on behalf of the peasantry (the tribals), and the tribals were mobilised to raise demands on behalf of the workers. The central demands of the tribals were formulated as the three "j's" -- *jamin* (land), *jungle*, and *jal* (water). These, the leaflet explained, not a single vote-party would be able to deliver.

Actually there was scope to demonstrate the commonality of interests. The mechanics, machinememen, and earthmovers were themselves of poor peasant background. Those from the local area -- especially the Nominal Muster Roll workers -- did not have their land recorded in their own name. For these sections of workers it was easy to relate to the Sangh's demands. Other workers too could be appealed to at the general political level.

As for the tribals, they also need employment, and they can see how keeping the project machineries idle prevents job creation. They know well how the contract system denies proper wages, denies permanency, and does a bad job. Hence they also find it easy to identify with the main slogans of the workers.

May Day was thus projected as the day of all the toiling masses, who fought not only for an eight-hour day, but against all exploitation. The leaflet explained

the birth of the Red Flag, the symbol of collective strength, sacrifice, and struggle. The leaflet discussed the specific oppression faced by tribals and dalits in this society. It explained also the workers' role in bringing about a change in the society. It discussed how, although the immediate demands may be relatively small, if united, we can change the conditions of our labour. Neither appeals nor electoral pretences can get our demands fulfilled; even for the smallest of our demands we cannot rely on election promises, but rather we will have to fight.

This first May Day programme in 1992 was successful beyond all expectations. A 3,000 strong worker-peasant rally presented demands to the tehsildar. More significant was the fact that people came from far and wide to reach the rally site, Chitrakonda, walking for six to seven hours, and staying at the site overnight. Equally, the effect of the rally was widespread. The leaflets reached distant places as an island region which can only be reached by boat and seven to eight hours journey from Chitrakonda, and Paplur -- to the southwest, near East Godavari. And it was these leaflets that set in motion activities in those distant regions.

The following year the rally was held at Malkangiri town, with the same policy of uniting with the existing workforce there. Various forces, such as khalasis (head-load workers) and Dandakaranya project employees pitched in. Balimela workers came all the way to Malkangiri for the rally. (Consistently they have been

contributing substantial monetary amounts to all such programmes as well.) Again the rally was a resounding success. Each year, the leaflets improved, and provided deeper and deeper political understanding to the participants.

Unity in action

How the workers' and peasants' unity can in practice defeat the enemy was seen in the Tapu (island) area. The leaflets of May Day, followed by classes held for adivasi youth, and the December 1992 conference of the Adibasi Sangh, inspired the landless half-starved tribals of the remote Tapu region. The Balimela workers built firm bonds with the tribals from the start of the movement.

Thus in January 1993 the Tapu tribals grabbed upto 1,500 acres under seven villages in this region, the main ones being Mulaput, Joda Amb, and Sindhiput. When the police came and arrested 27 persons in March 1993, thousands of people came forward, demanding they too be arrested. The police had to remain in the region for two to three days attempting to pacify the people. The people blocked the departure of the launch for seven to eight hours, making it impossible for the police to leave.

Meanwhile, others had already departed to reach word to the Chitrakonda workers.

The launch left finally only at six p.m., and reached Chitrakonda late at night. There, the police found to their shock that the workers of the union were demonstrating against them! The workers demanded -- immediately produce the

arrested 27 in court! Why have you kept them so long without providing food? And so on. The police were compelled to provide food and take the tribals at four a.m. to Malkangiri to be produced.

Meanwhile the workers had contacted the district level Sangh activists, and the Sangh began to mobilise in the villages to go to the District Magistrate's court in Malkangiri. So the very day the arrested were to be produced there was a demonstration before the District Collector. The adivasis shouted -- when you don't give us land, what right do you have to snatch the land we have? By evening 3,000 people had collected, and the Collector was forced to get all 27 released on personal bond. He made a desperate attempt to rescue his reputation by offering money to feed the masses who had come to demonstrate. The tribals saw through this and refused to touch the money as long as their brethren in jail were not fed.

When the 27 were released at 8 p.m., the adivasis' joy knew no bounds. They had immensely greater confidence in their own strength as well as that of their class allies. It is to be noted too that most of these developments took place even though the more experienced organisers were absent at the time. The adivasis and workers took out a victory procession at 9 p.m., which the police attempted to stop on the ground that they did not have permission. We're tribals, said the leaders, we don't take permission from any authority to move about! What are the names of the leaders, said the police, trying to intimidate. And then the scene

was a flood of people demanding of the police: take my name, take my name also, take all our names!

II. How the Sangh was built

Malkangiri: most backward of the backward

Malkangiri is the poorest district in Orissa, itself the poorest state in the country. Orissa, with a total of 30 districts and a 1991 Census population of 317 lakh, had a per capita income in 1991-92 of Rs 1512 (compared to the all-India figure of Rs 2174). This fell further in 1992-93 to Rs 1442. 66 per cent of Orissa's population -- two out of every three people -- are below the poverty line. Infant mortality is an astounding 122 per 1000. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes make up over half the population of the state.

Malkangiri was formed in 1992 when Koraput district was carved into four parts (the others being Koraput, Nowrangpur, and Rayaguda). The district has seven blocks, three tehsils, and 77 gram panchayats. (However, official data cannot be relied upon: while 950 'revenue villages' are recorded officially, the actual number of villages in the district is over 3,000.) Its total population according to the 1991 Census was 4.2 lakh.

Of the 4.2 lakh population, 1.2 lakh or so are Bengali refugees re-settled by the Government in this region. About 0.5 lakh other non-tribals (including Scheduled Castes) also live in the region. The rest are a very large assortment of tribes -- apart from dozens of Orissa tribes, there are some tribes here the dominant portion of which reside in A.P. or M.P.

A large number of tribals in the region have been victims of displacement for one

or the other project: according to one calculation, over six per cent of the population of undivided Koraput have been ousted in this fashion.

Birth of the Sangh

The birth of Malkangiri Adibasi Sangh dates back to a spontaneous movement of 1977. In the Manaskhunda jungle belt, the forest officials got a number of tribals arrested from 40 villages in order to punish them for having settled forest lands. In response, some persons without party affiliation mobilised people to go to Balimela in thousands to protest. The gathering there has been estimated at upto 10,000. The tribals refused to leave the spot for two days, demanding the release of their brethren. When finally their demand was conceded and some discussions were underway with the officials, it was felt necessary to take a name, at which time the name "Jan Pal Sangh" was taken.

Some persons from Jan Pal Sangh knew of the communist revolutionary com. Purshottam Pali (living underground in the region), and they asked him to guide the organisation. Initial organisation-building efforts took place, and there was great scope. By 1983 the Malkangiri Adibasi Sangh could hold its first conference.

Reversal

However, wrong political leadership later demoralised the entire organisation in the region. This took the form of

making the Sangh a pocket organisation of a political group, scuttling all democratic functioning, stripping the mass organisation of all powers -- even to draft a leaflet on its own -- and thus stifling the initiative of the masses themselves. The area of work remained restricted to part of Birlakhanpur, part of Tarlakota, Doraguda, and Gunthawada.

The nail in the coffin was the imposition of a decision to contest the 1985 elections, with the Sangh putting up a candidate. Thereafter, because of the inner-organisational struggle in the erstwhile UCCRI (ML) on the question of elections, this area was entirely neglected. Comrade Purshottam Pali, who had dedicated his life to the struggle, died before he could see the development of the organisation for which he had worked so tirelessly.

By 1988-89, the main original tribal leadership had been made into a non-political lot, barring a handful. While there was still militancy, there was no democratic practice, nor was there unity -- tribal was set against tribal. Yet there was still, despite it all, the aspiration to have a Sangh, and to build it properly.

Revival

The immediate task was the democratisation of the Sangh and building it as a true mass organisation. The efforts began with a drive to raise funds for a martyr's pillar in memory of comrade Pali. Although there was some attempted disruption by UCCRI (Muktigami) comrades, this was soon overcome and a successful

programme could be held at the martyr's memorial. Then, step by step, the mass activity was re-started, village committees and panchayat-level committees were re-started, and agitations were launched -- land movements at Pada Magazine and Bansaguda, agitations against bribes, against bank officials' corruption, against forest officials.

With regularisation of activity, organisational functioning, and selection of representative committees, the emphasis was placed on encouraging the involvement and initiative of the people. The mass organisation members were asked to draft their own leaflets, devise programmes, etc. Moreover, collective functioning was emphasized: any leaflet, once drafted and corrected, would be read in the committee meeting and passed, and only thereafter be printed. In this fashion the idea that 'outside' leadership is the centre was step by step removed, and a sense of self-confidence was built up among the tribals.

A special role was accorded to the charter of demands. The Sangh's charter of demands is treated as virtually a mini-manifesto, with each demand and its significance discussed in the village committees, based on specific instances relevant to the local area. For the Sangh members, comprehension of this charter of demands and its significance constitute the reason for their support of the Sangh. (In each village committee, there are at least a few who can read.) Each year, the charter of demands is revised and renewed, with the involvement of committees at all levels. Since 1992, the Sangh has made a practice of renewing its charter on May

Day, where copies of the charter are distributed on a mass scale.

By the time of the second conference of the Malkangiri Adibasi Sangh in December 1992 (the first having been held in 1983), the organisation had consolidated its work in the earlier-mentioned regions, as well as extended its work to Pandharipani panchayat (on the basis of the land movement at Bansaguda), Kathapalli, Bhejaguda, and Maupadhar panchayats (on the basis of the fight against forest and revenue officials) -- at Maupadhar (on the basis of the fight against felling of trees by the Orissa Forest Corporation), two panchayats of the Tapu area (on the basis of the fight against contractors, on the wage issue), new areas of Birlakhanpur and Tarlakota (on the basis of the fight against mamool collections by bank officials and revenue officials). At the same time, existing work was consolidated and taken ahead in Doraguda, Gunthawada, and Chitrakonda.

At the conference, the immediate tasks were: consolidation of the organisation at various village levels; building up panchayat-level committees at all possible levels; and spreading the Sangh's message to new areas.

Building Sangh cadre

The Sangh employs a variety of means to equip its raw cadre-force, both practically and theoretically. On one level, the Sangh organises activities such as health camps, where sympathetic doctors from other parts of Orissa train the Sangh activists in recognising and treating common ailments. Combined with this, classes are organised by the Sangh to help

the cadre to understand fully the manifesto, the charter of demands, the past history of Koraput region and its struggles, the history of social development and the role of the State in society, the nature of the present Indian society, India's place in the world, and finally the alternative organisation of the people in building a democratic State, and how to build such an organisation.

These classes have the difficult task of going from the very elementary stages to the relatively more complex. Various points of general knowledge also have to be covered in the classes. They help greatly in understanding and linking up with the world outside the immediate surroundings of the tribals, thus laying the basis for being able to conceive an alternative social order itself.

At the end of each such set of classes, the youth who attend, in their enthusiasm, spontaneously begin giving undertakings and oaths regarding what responsibility they would take on for the Sangh, including many offers to work full-time for the Sangh. While in practice not all carry through their commitments, nevertheless the classes serve as a crucial boost to the building of the organisation. The Tapu class, for example, became the basis for the land movement that followed immediately after the December 1992 conference.

The confidence of the tribals also got built up as they saw the fruit of their small and big battles. With regular rallies at the district headquarters, consistent agitations on various issues, and working class assistance, the Sangh

was able to force the district administration to negotiate on a number of issues, largely conceding immediate demands (while putting off longer-term ones). As it showed the effectiveness of getting organised the Sangh attracted more and more to its ranks.

Adversaries of the Sangh

The Sangh identified its main immediate opponents as follows:

(1) The colonial-era expropriation of the tribals' forest by the British rulers is continued to date. The tribals' land is thus all in the hands of the State. A variety of exploiters, official and non-official, can use this as an instrument for feudal extractions from the tribals. Thus the State, the forest department, forest officials, and the revenue officials are first on the list of enemies. Revenue officials collect *salaami* on a large scale. It is not uncommon for them to collect Rs 30,000 to Rs 50,000 from a single village, promising to make *pattas* granting the tribals security of tenure on the the land; yet no *pattas* are finally given.

(2) A second major group of opponents are landlords and *sahukars* (generally non-tribals, but including some tribals too), who by various fraudulent means, including in particular usury, have grabbed the tribals' land. (On the other hand, the tribals have no basic contradiction with the non-tribal poor living in the region.)

(3) The next major group of opponents are

the contractors, who exploit the tribals' desperation for employment by paying them miserable wages, or not paying them at all (sometimes the 'payment' consists simply of giving them a feast, or some wine, or some help in bad times).

(4) Then there are various other opponents, such as so-called 'developmental' and 'welfare' officials who siphon off funds meant for welfare schemes, and extract bribes for any type of developmental work; and there is the 'health' department, which is completely non-existent in the villages of Malkangiri, and whose doctors are absent without leave even as thousands die like flies during epidemics.

Of course, while these are some of the immediate enemies, as the struggle gets fiercer, others quickly start making their class character plain by attacking the Sangh: for example -- the police, the courts (the State machinery as a whole), a corrupt section of lawyers (who operate as police touts), parliamentary political parties, and, more recently, so-called voluntary organisations, etc .

Demands of the Sangh

As mentioned earlier in this article, the three main demands of the Sangh are land, forest, and water. For these demands, the Sangh specifically propagates: (1) Don't give any bribe to any official -- for grass, wood, house-building materials, etc -- for being allowed to gather forest produce. (2) We will not stop our struggle unless we get permanent *pattas* for the land we cultivate. (3) Drinking water must be supplied to each village, and irrigation

water to all arable land. (4) Issues amongst ourselves we will not take to the courts, but to the Sangh. (5) People from all areas should mobilise in support of any particular area, especially where the organisation is new or the situation is tricky.

III. The Sangh in struggle

Debt-cancellation struggles

It was after about 18 to 24 months of preparatory work that, in 1990, the activities of the Sangh began picking up. In 1990, after the Janata Dal came to office, and declared cancellation of rural debts upto Rs 10,000, the Sangh exposed how in fact the loans of the small borrowers such as the tribals were not being cancelled. It carried out detailed surveys of the fate of such loans. It wrote detailed articles on the "Class character of the loan cancellation scheme", which were widely publicised. The Sangh gheraoed banks such as Panchavati Grameen Bank (sponsored by State Bank of India),

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Land-grab movements

Around the same time, in 1990, the land-grab movements began to take off. For example, in Pada Magazine village (under Chitrakonda panchayat), where forest officials had seized 150 acres cultivated by the tribals, the people fought back and re-captured the land. Incidentally, the forest officials had done this two years

earlier, too, and then too the people had re-captured the land. This time, despite arrests and repression, the tribals held on to the land, with the mobilisation and support of the Sangh from Doraguda and Gunthawada panchayats.

It was important in these landgrabs for the Sangh to make detailed preparations. A notable instance was in May-June 1991, when about 500 acres of land were occupied by tribals in five villages of Pandharipani panchayat (Bansaguda, Pujarimunda, Sabha colony, Pandharipani colony, and Sargiguda). It was necessary to prepare for arrests, and to make sure that, if one batch of ploughers were arrested, another would take their place. The women were also involved. Secondly, a large number were mobilised to support the ploughing. The demarcations set up by the forest officials were taken down, shrubs were uprooted, and ploughing continued for three days. When officials threatened them, the tribals said: We don't mind giving up this land. But you provide us land elsewhere -- we are landless. On the one hand the officials had no answer to this argument; on the other, as the tribals said, "they won't dare to attack us as long as we have the ploughs in our hands" (the ploughs can be used as weapons).

In Tapu region, one of the significant struggles was under Panasput panchayat, Gurasettu village, where two non-tribal landlords, Gopal Rao and Prasad Rao, had amassed huge lands -- all the land from Mukudpalli, and land from Bejing and Jamuguda. These lands had been acquired over the course of 30 years through usury

and liquor selling. The Sangh first targeted Prasad Rao, and occupied his lands during July-August 1992. Within a month the Sangh also occupied Gopal Rao's lands in Mukudpalli and Jamuguda. Although the two landlords tried their best through officialdom to get the land back, they failed. After one year, they then demanded some share of the crop. With the help of the Revenue Inspector, they extracted a share from many. Those who did not agree were taken to Malkangiri with the false story that there were cases against them in court (in these backward regions, people treat advocates' notices as if they were court orders). Then the Sangh intervened, and Gopal Rao was forced to make out an agreement to the effect that he could neither demand the land back nor any share of the crop.

Similar significant struggles are being waged in Potrel, Tarlakota, and Paplur panchayats against non-tribal landlord-cum-goondas who have taken away tribals' land.

Fighting the Forest Department to defend land

The Forest Department, too, has tasted major defeats at the hands of the tribals. At Birlakhanpur panchayat, the Government took over about 500 acres of tribal land in the name of the Wasteland Development Project, and began plantation of trees. The Sangh decided to fight back in a massive way. The entire panchayat was organised into village-level committees. Rallies were held at the panchayat headquarters, and a public meeting of

4,000 was held (virtually all men, women, and children of the panchayat turned up). Then the Sangh recaptured the whole 500 acres. The officials attempted to prevent this and tried to terrorise the tribals. The fight continued for a week before officialdom had to retreat, licking its wounds. They called the Sangh for negotiations with the Collector and Soil Conservation Department officials. Over 100 Sangh members attended the meeting. The Sangh said: we support afforestation; but we are landless. Without land, we cannot live. So first give us permanent titles to the land, then we will allow plantation of trees. Secondly, we should have the choice of what plants and trees are grown here.

The officials finally (1) promised land records, (2) passed an order (with a copy given to the tribals) to the effect that any land in the tribals' possession shall not be transferred to any Government department and such land will be possessed by the concerned tribal; the fruits of the plants on such land will be enjoyed by the tribal, and intercropping rights will be enjoyed by him/her. (Interestingly, despite these concessions the people did not eventually allow plantation. Plantation was only carried out on 50 acres of the originally planned 1,000 acres. The people however allowed a minor irrigation scheme to be constructed, as it was in their interest.)

Now the situation in the Sangh's struggle areas is such that it is virtually impossible for the Government to carry out forcible plantation by snatching away the tribals' land. Only if the Sangh

gives its okay, and on the Sangh's terms, is plantation allowed. In the Tapu region, all the DFOs belonging to the territorial forest, and the DFOs belonging to the plantation/afforestation and soil conservation offices, came to the Sangh, and held negotiations under the chairmanship of the Collector. They displayed satellite pictures of deforestation and said that these areas *must* be replanted. It is a Central Government decision. The Government, they said, had been pressurised to do so by the international community. (As if, in order that Germany or France or America do not have to carry out afforestation on their own soil, the tribals of Malkangiri should give up their means of production!)

The Sangh said fine, go ahead and plant; but on one condition. Give a minimum of five acres of alternative land to each landless person. (The land in this region is *dungar* -- ie hilly -- land, and there is little good land; hence the five-acre minimum.) Since the Government has not been willing to fulfill this condition, plantation cannot go ahead.

Chawlamendhi struggle

A difficult situation was confronted in Chawlamendhi panchayat, Mathili village, the block headquarters. (Mathili is the village where the great tribal martyr of Koraput, Lakhan Nayak, had led a gherao of the officials in 1942. He was later hanged by the British.) In Mathili the forest department, with the help of the village sarpanch (a Janata Dal man) grabbed 200

acres of the Harijans' (Dalits') land. In November 1993 a gathering was fixed at Mathili, but the sarpanch's goondas attacked, armed with lethal weapons and guns. The meeting could not continue, and had to be adjourned to another place.

Then it was decided to hold a meeting again, but this time with larger mobilisation and proper preparation. The Sangh workers told all the members: come armed with traditional weapons (most common being a *tangia* -- an axe). Hundreds of Sangh workers came from far-off places for the meet. The sarpanch tried counter-mobilisation, but even his ward members did not listen to him. Then the sarpanch tried to work out a compromise, but the Sangh leaders refused.

The meeting was held on December 25, 1993. A large police contingent turned up at the site to terrorise the villagers, but nevertheless thousands of people came from the panchayat area. (It is important to remember here that tribals were being mobilised in support of, not other tribals, but Harijans. The Sangh mobilises all non-tribal toiling peasantry as well on the basis of its charter of demands.) A grand march was held in the village, and at the meeting even women came forward and spoke against the sarpanch, the forest officials and the revenue officers, how they are one in repressing Harijans and tribals. After the meeting, the Sangh occupied the land. People made it clear to the officials that they had brought their weapons. Seeing the numbers involved, the forest officials only put up token opposition.

Repression

As can be seen in the above instance, there is growing repression from the ruling class sections and the State on these struggles. In about 50 per cent of the Sangh's struggles tribals are arrested and booked in various cases. These criminal cases have become a huge burden on the Sangh. The tribal has to travel to distant courts for the hearings, and loses income. Several of the lawyers in these courts are thieves, who charge fat fees as well as tout for the police. Apart from attempting to obtain cheaper legal aid, the Sangh has been fighting for the withdrawal of these cases at various levels. There are about 700 *podu* (shifting cultivation) cases alone in the district for which the Sangh has raised demands at the state level for their immediate withdrawal.

Self-defence

Goonda violence too is growing. In response, there has been an increasing need for the building up of people's self-defence. In Doraguda-Gunthawada, for example, where people mobilised against contractors, and where the corrupt sarpanch in Gunthawada was brought to the meeting and openly criticised, the sarpanch organised goondas threatening to retaliate. Thereafter the Sangh prepared the people to resist. Women were easily mobilised because the struggle also involved the fight against drinking.

Precautions were also taken regarding moving about: when going out of the village, the villagers would move about in groups of five or six.

In Paplur panchayat, a landlord-sahukar-goonda who had been terrorising the people of Engurai and had been foisting criminal cases on the people was forced to concede defeat before a people's panchayat. Workers boycotted his fields, and all connections with him were snapped. Anticipating retaliation, the villagers in the entire panchayat were organised for a "village guard" system, prepared to counter-attack.

Still, villagers used to visit Sileru village in A.P. for the weekly market. Once three girls were attacked by the landlords' goondas. Two escaped and one was molested. A rape case was filed; the landlord was beaten by the people; and he had to spend two months in jail. Since then, as per the Sangh decision, the villagers in this region always move about outside the village with lathis and axes.

Tapu: repression and resistance

It is in the Tapu region (containing 151 revenue villages -- actually, there are over 200 villages in the region -- under six panchayats) where repression has been fiercest. Earlier we have mentioned the struggle with the police. But more than that, there have been attacks by goondas in important villages of the movement. The main workers of the Sangh have been physically attacked. An alliance sprang up of contractors, politicians (Janata Dal and Congress) and certain

"teachers" (who were practising usury on the villagers). It attempted to demoralise the Sangh activists on the one hand by campaigning that they were "PWG activists"; dacoits were employed to attack, loot, and burn down houses in village after village; family pressures were brought to bear on individual activists; and a climate of great terror was created.

In response the Sangh chose to build up self-defence at the village level. The question came up from the villagers: how were these "gramya rakhya bahinis" to fight the dacoits? The Sangh leadership explained: do it as if it were the *benta* (ie *shikar* -- hunting down) of a tiger or other wild animal. This way of presenting it was quickly understood, and though the leadership did not have enough time to make truly adequate preparations for such an important task, the people in village after village armed themselves with bows-and-arrows and axes. They have had significant success wherever they are organised. This activity is continuing to date. The latest situation is that recently 25 villages were attacked by dacoits: in twenty cases, where the Sangh is not strong, there was no resistance; in five cases, where the Sangh is strong, the villagers have dealt serious blows to the dacoits (some of the dacoits were injured and at least one killed in each confrontation).

Forest officials' extractions

Apart from the direct issue of land, the Sangh also organises against other

types of rent-extraction: for example, the forest officials' *mamool* collections. This struggle goes on wherever the Sangh is working. Notable struggles were waged in Kathapalli (September 1991), where a panchayat-level committee was formed against the extraordinarily high *mamool* collection, and a forest official was gheraoed. At Khandigapada the forest official who came to collect *mamool* was beaten and sent packing. A similar beating took place in a village of Bhejaguda panchayat. (There was one interesting instance in Kathapalli panchayat where the forest official who came to collect *mamools* was first served a meal with so much chillies that it was inedible. He took the hint and ran off without collecting the *mamool*!

A more recent instance was in February 1994 at Markepalli, where a forester (exploiting the clause whereby the Government is to collect "nominal royalty" on adivasis' collection of wood for house-building) extracted about Rs 5,000 from the desperately poor tribals. He gave the villagers a receipt of just Rs 200/-. It was the women's wing of the Sangh that organised women and men of the panchayat to assemble at Sargiguda and suddenly gherao the guilty forester. The women gave him a good thrashing, insulted him publicly, and virtually stamped all over him in their rage.

Contractors

Another major rallying-point for the Sangh has been the issue of wages paid by contractors. The minimum daily wage

declared by the Government is Rs 25/-. Nowhere is this given by the contractors. Normally they give Rs 15/- per day to the men and Rs 12/- to the women. There is a large amount of work carried out by private contractors for the Forest Department, the Public Works Department, the Rural Employment Officer (REO), the Irrigation Department, etc. The Sangh's simple demand is implementation of Rs 25/- per day wages, and equal wages for men and women. Contractors who do not provide the wages are targeted by the Sangh, and struggle has even forced the Collector to blacklist certain contractors. In one case, the Collector was forced to subtract the unpaid wages from the amount paid to the contractor, and pay them directly to the workers.

As a result, there are physical confrontations with contractors. For example, in Korukonda, where sarpanches and contractors were misappropriating Jawahar Rozgar Yojana money in the name of non-existent contract work, Sangh village committees compelled them to start up actual work. In the course of this one contractor retaliated by having a Sangh worker attacked in Korukonda bazaar. When the Sangh activist defended himself, he was arrested and charged with stabbing. At present a struggle is also going on against a Janata Dal-affiliated contractor named Jadu Swain. He has threatened to get the Sangh leaders killed, and is busy petitioning ministers for repression of the Sangh.

One tactic employed by the Sangh for a while was to demand that certain labour contracts not be given to the contractors,

and instead be carried out by the Sangh. The Sangh would ensure the proper payment of wages to all. The Balimela union helped the Sangh in snatching several contracts away from the contractors. However, this tactic also leads to the eruption of many small contradictions among the workers as to who will be given work, how much they should be paid, and so on. So this tactic has been abandoned.

Tendu leaf picking

The price given per tendu leaf in Orissa is only half a paisa, whereas in A.P. it is one paisa. Border checks are placed by the Orissa government to prevent people crossing the border into A.P. to get better rates.

The Sangh has argued that, given that the minimum wage is Rs 25/day, the price per leaf should be at least two paise. If one gets two paise per leaf, working for eight hours picking leaves one will earn Rs 20/-. Recently the Orissa government has declared it will raise the rates to three-fourths of a paisa (on the condition of a certain minimum number leaves being collected), but even this is not implemented.

The main struggles till now have gone on regarding sheer non-payment of wages. Such non-payment by tendu leaf contractors can go on for even a year. The Sangh organised at various phodis (centres for depositing the tendu leaves), such as Kathameta, Pandharipani, Tarlakota, Balimela, etc. Militant gheraos were organised of forest officials. Now, wherever the Sangh has organised the pickers,

payment is made. But a hike in the rate of payment is yet to be won.

Police repression in the name of suppressing the PWG

A tricky question in this area is the presence of squads of the People's War Group. No doubt many sincere comrades of these squads are carrying on struggle for revolution according to what they believe to be the correct path. However, they do not take the path of involving people, organising them on their small demands and raising them steadily to higher and higher levels, and instilling confidence in them that they can solve their own problems through struggle. They do not see the need for genuine mass organisations with a mass character.

Hence, they operate only where people are unorganised, have a low level of consciousness, and look to outsiders as saviours. Where the Sangh works, people feel confident in themselves and do not see the need for those whom they call "barihas" (wild boars, who stay only in the forest).

In the name of hunting for the PWG squads, the police attack the tribals, arrest them, loot their property, and extort sums of money from them. In particular, the A.P. police cross the border and carry out such acts, and the Orissa police allow them to do so.

For example, the A.P. police, with the help of two dacoits Kumar Reddy and Settuguranna, came to Kenduguda village and Rasaguda village, where they seized 12 kg and 30 kg, respectively, of ganja. They

arrested a boatman, Amal Ray, and demanded Rs 1500 from him. The Sangh held a meeting on October 1, 1993, at Kunnanur (Papalur panchayat), and then gheraoed Kalimela police station demanding the arrest of the dacoits and of the A.P. police. The Orissa police were forced to arrest the two dacoits at Rajmahendri and institute proceedings against the A.P. police (three police officials have been suspended).

The cultivation of ganja by tribals in some hilly areas has been another opportunity for the police to harass the tribals and make illegal extractions. The tribals resort to ganja cultivation because rice or other grains do not grow on these lands. The Sangh has taken the following stand: we tribals want to stop ganja cultivation. But we cannot do so without an alternative. Hence we demand free saplings for fruit cultivation, which is possible here. We will not allow Government planting of these saplings on our lands. The Government must hand the saplings over to the Sangh, which will distribute the saplings. In this fashion the Sangh has demanded, received and distributed 10,000 saplings in Papalur panchayat last year, and is distributed one lakh saplings this year. In fact the Sangh has also made its views known through the press, in order to expose the propaganda that the Sangh protects ganja cultivation.

Emerging women's wing

The Nari Sangathan (women's organisation) wing of the Sangh has come into existence in the course of the rising tide

of the Sangh's struggles. Especially during the Birlakhanpur land movement and the Doraguda anti-goonda movement, at the initiative of women a women's wing was formed. The women also took initiative in the forming of a cultural team in mid-August 1993. A renowned blind cultural worker of the area (poet and dramatist) has given up all his work in traditional drama to work solely for the Sangh's cultural team.

The women's wing has in particular taken the lead in anti-liquor struggles and in anti-rape struggles. (Even in respect of contradictions among the people, the women's wing plays a role. It has taken a decision that if any person gets drunk and creates problems, all the women will get together and give him a thrashing. Even if the man who is guilty is a Sangh activist, he is not spared by the women.)

A major case taken up by the Nari Sangathan was the Jamuna-Uttara rape case. The rapist, a goonda, had paid money to the police, as a result of which the police neither acted nor even sent the victim for medical examination. On February 9, 1994, the Nari Sangathan held a rally jointly with other organisations of the region against the rape. Despite the pouring rain there was a large turnout, and the main slogans were anti-police. The rallyists shouted that police were responsible for allowing liquor dens to operate, and that police took bribes for suppressing rape cases. The rallyists, after presenting their charter of demands to the tehsildar, and confident with the strength of their numbers, promptly

smashed four liquor dens in the vicinity. As yet, however, the women's wing is in an embryonic stage. It needs some sustained effort to consolidate and regularise it.

Owning the Sangh

Because of the Sangh's approach and its methods of struggle, those who are not in the Sangh, too, get inspired to get organised. And those who get organised own the Sangh as their own. Tribals in the panchayats of Tandki and Chalanaguda, near Malkangiri district headquarters, are new entrants to the Sangh. In this region all lands are forest lands owned by the State. The tribals are poor peasants who have to work eight months of the year as agricultural labourers or other casual labour. They have been enthusiastically attending all Sangh programmes, and even travel long distances to attend the Sangh classes at various places. For a long time they have been demanding that the Sangh hold a big rally in their area, and call Sangh members from various other places.

Recently tribals from two villages worked on a job for a full month, but deliberately did not collect their pay till the last day. On the last day, they collected the amount and deposited it all with the Sangh leaders. Now they were assertive: "We have now collected sufficient funds. You tell us how much it costs to print the leaflet. Is that all? Now you tell us how much it will cost to feed one thousand people. Here is the amount. When will you hold the meeting?"

In this fashion they organised a grand

meeting, hosted a night meal for over a thousand outsiders, and felt a great boost in their confidence. After the programme, as the Sangh leaders were departing, the villagers came running after them: there was some money left over from the expenses, which they wanted to donate to the Sangh. Thus the whole of their wages for a whole month were spent on the Sangh!

Recently tribals of Ramagiri-Boipuriguda block of Koraput district came and contacted the Sangh, demanding it should organise that region as well. 50 Sangh activists went to the region, travelling from village to village over the course of a month and organising four to five meets, including two large rallies. A charter of demands was worked out for the Koraput adivasis, but as yet the Sangh in this region is at the level of propaganda and education: real struggle on the charter of demands has yet to be initiated.

In sheer area, the Sangh has now spread over most of Malkangiri district (though not to all the villages within that area). The length of its field of operation, from Ramgiri (in Koraput district, to the north) to Paplur, at the A.P. border, is 250 km.

IV. The building of political consciousness as an integral part of mass struggle

At this point we need to take note of certain politically significant aspects. First, the Sangh has not only made its place in the hearts of large masses of tribals, but has attempted to show how they themselves, if organised, can govern their own affairs and collectively assert their authority, an authority to counter the authority of the ruling classes. At each stage, the Sangh attempts to inculcate into all its struggle-tactics the need for the tribals to see through the existing system in all its respects, and to place faith only in their own organised strength, as well as the strength of other sections of toiling people.

One important activity towards this end has been the steadfast exposure of all the ruling class institutions and propaganda. For while the ruling class and State machinery use repression on the one hand, they are also straining every nerve to create illusions among the tribals, to win over or corrupt Sangh activists, and to divide the people into warring sections. Hence it is vital for the Sangh to pick up every opportunity to expose these efforts. For this a systematic campaign is required, linked to the practical experience of the tribals in struggle.

Just before the Sangh conference, the Government bifurcated Koraput district into four (Malkangiri, Koraput, Nowrangpur and Rayaguda). The new collector of Malkangiri immediately painted himself as a great progressive. He went so far as to

circulate a 10-point leaflet among the tribals, calling on them to help build a "socialist Malkangiri"! The Sangh's counter-leaflet, analysing all his 10 points in detail, received wide publicity, and caused the Collector embarrassment. The Collector also asked permission to attend the Sangh conference, but the Sangh refused.

After the conference, the Sangh made preparations for such a campaign by carrying out extensive surveys in the Sangh regions, using detailed questionnaires. The Sangh activists took these from village to village. The questionnaires related to the following: (1) the land position (on which there were three questionnaires) -- what type of land, occupation, ownership, pattas, etc; (2) land "encroachment" cases and the amounts being extorted above the legally fixed fines; (3) diarrhoea deaths due to lack of clean drinking water and health facilities; (4) corruption by bank officials in regard to tribals' loans; and (5) the position regarding drinking water in each village. All these questionnaires became, on the one hand, useful to expose the Government propaganda, and, on the other, to begin struggles.

Immediately after the conference, the Collector held negotiations with the Sangh. During negotiations, he "conceded" 70 per cent of the Sangh's demands. He even went so far as to declare that tribals had a right over their own land, and that they had the right to resist eviction! Seeing through the tactic, the Sangh immediately circulated a leaflet: "Promises made by the Collector", in which

all the points on which he had orally conceded were recorded. In the next negotiation the Collector took objection to the leaflet -- "This reads like a Communist Manifesto!")

Under pressure, the Collector said he would take two months to ensure land to "all". Promptly the Sangh began a land survey in the villages, and told the Collector, "to help you keep your promise we are collecting data". Of course, the Collector had no intention of giving land! In fact, two months later, after the Sangh had already submitted the results of its questionnaire, the Collector explained that he could not act because "we are still gathering data". The Sangh made this an occasion to expose the Collector's progressive claims before the tribals, and to explain that, without the toiling people's political power, the demand for land will remain unsatisfied.

Similarly, just before the Malkangiri by-election (in May 1992) the Government declared in the Assembly that no village should suffer from lack of drinking water. If your village lacks drinking water, simply write an application to the Collector, and by such-and-such date, we will take care of each tubewell.

The Sangh in response printed a leaflet, explaining to the people how it was necessary to expose this fake promise. The Sangh called upon each village without drinking water source to write an application, and to route its application through the Sangh. Soon hundreds of applications were delivered to the Sangh office. Of course, the Government did not provide drinking water. In this fashion

the Sangh was able to show concretely how the rulers are unwilling and incapable of fulfilling even the most elementary demands of the people.

Now, again, with the approach of elections, the Government is propagating that land records will be made out before the election. The Sangh has openly declared this to be untrue, but has also challenged the Government to make out the records. For the Government to give the land records would mean abrogating the repressive Forest Act (which appropriates all tribals' forest land). Inevitably the Government will not be able to fulfill this promise, and the Sangh will have one more opportunity to point out to the people the alternative path for winning their land.

Attempts to co-opt

One continuous effort of the Government is to co-opt the Sangh activists in one way or another. Some of these ways are quite naked. For example, in each negotiation the Collector makes direct attempts at winning over the activists with promises, sweet talk, and so on. He has been directly asking the Sangh to take the responsibility for the Total Literacy Campaign in the region, and has offered the activists lucrative posts, including that of the chief district coordinator of the TLC! The Sangh has rejected all these efforts consciously. The Sangh activists treat these pretensions with scant respect. "Stop trying to behave like a socialist leader" they told him in the most recent negotiation (for which 2,000 tribals gathered). "For 80 per cent of our

demands you say they are 'justified' but you are helpless to implement them. Then what authority do you have to negotiate?"

Another attempt to co-opt and trap the Sangh was the Government's offer that the Sangh could set up cooperatives for the purchase of minor forest products from the tribals. The Government was even willing to advance lakhs of rupees for such a project. Thus the Sangh was to be made into the instrument for looting the tribals according to the scheme laid down by the Government -- with bribes thrown in for good measure. The Sangh was to be transformed from a fighting organisation into a commercial enterprise. The Sangh immediately rejected the offer and reiterated its demand for the Government to purchase the tribals' products at fair prices.

A significant development has taken place in the last few months. Seeing that its efforts are getting nowhere on its own, the Government has recruited the help of foreign-funded voluntary agencies. DANIDA, a government-to-government aid agency, has now begun funding wasteland development in six villages of Pandharipani and Birlakhanpur panchayats. DANIDA operates through government officials in its project activity, and the liaison with the local people is carried out through the Tagore Society, a large and well-known "Non-Governmental Organisation" (NGO) based in West Bengal.

DANIDA has chosen to start up its operations specifically in the areas that are the oldest base of the Sangh. The Tagore Society has employed, as its "motivators", local BJP and Congress-I leaders,

anti-social elements. A handful of backward elements among the people too have been co-opted. The initial projects they have chosen -- watershed development, digging of ponds for pisciculture -- are in fact attractive to the people, and in fact tribals otherwise even take loans to carry out such work.

So it must have been a shock to the Government and the voluntary agencies that the tribals instead outright rejected all of DANIDA's programmes. They demanded to know what was the intention of foreign agencies entering their region. On June 19 a meeting was called on the slogan "DANIDA go back!" The leaflet taken out by the Sangh exposed how DANIDA's taking of local people as motivators is an attempt to divide the Sangh at the village level. As the class struggle is advancing, the Government wishes to smash the Sangh at the places where it is most deep-rooted. The new programme is like an axe on the roots of the Sangh. What the Government cannot do directly (forcible plantation), it will get these agencies to do on its behalf. In fact, now, as the polarisation takes place between the Sangh and the elements that stand with the exploiters, the class struggle aspect of the movement is coming to the fore. All these points were explained in detail in the leaflet.

(As the protest paralysed the DANIDA work, the local officialdom have been saying, let the Sangh take up the job in place of the Tagore Society! A crore of rupees has come for the project -- why waste it -- etc. In spite of the acute situation of the tribals, and the attraction of the large sum of money, the Sangh

has spurned these offers. The Sangh has made a counter-offer: We will allow these so-called developmental programmes only after you fulfill our primary condition: give land to the landless, and give clear permanent title of all lands. The Sangh knows perfectly well that this condition will never be fulfilled by the present system.)

On the one hand, then, the efforts at coopting/dividing the Sangh are at full steam. On the other, the same rulers are also carrying on repression -- with goonda attacks, arrests, serious cases on leading activists, spreading fear among the tribals, etc. This two-pronged policy continues to date.

Some conclusions

We have seen, in the above article, how the Sangh has been revived, taken roots among the tribal masses, and spread. We have seen how it has become their own Sangh, their trusty weapon against all exploiters and oppressors. We have also seen how it has on the one hand been an instrument to win immediate, partial demands as well as to raise consciousness through each fight for the struggle for the longer-term, basic demands (which the present State and social system are incapable of fulfilling). This has been ensured by, on the one hand, establishing the *mass character* and *democratic functioning* of the Sangh. And, on the other hand, it has been ensured by consistently providing the *correct political direction* to enable each partial fight to strengthen the resolve for the basic

struggle; instilling confidence in the tribals that they, through their struggles and through the medium of their mass organisations, can become the alternative centres of power and authority; and finally, by concretely attempting to demonstrate how, with the assistance of class allies, in particular the leadership of the working class, they need to and can bring about an alternative set-up, their own rule.

Movement at an important juncture

Yet, despite its rich history, and despite its present vibrancy, the Sangh is yet to be fully tested in the fire. As the ruling class efforts at repression or derauling of the Sangh continue to fail, and as the Sangh continues to spread and heighten its activities, the stage is rapidly approaching when the ruling class will mount a major offensive against the Sangh. There are various possible forms that this offensive might assume.

One is an attempt to whip up communal riots among the people -- between tribals and the Bengali refugee peasants who have been settled in the region. The Sangh has always treated the Bengali refugees as class allies, but the actual task of organising these sections -- who are from a much more advanced feudal agriculture, and who are miles ahead of the tribals in sophistication -- is hardly begun. Given the existing tensions between the relatively backward tribals and the Bengali refugees, there is ground for ruling class divide-and-rule tactics. Such tactics were signalled in a recent speech given in the

region by the Chief Minister himself, where he attempted to whip up anti-Bengali Oriya chauvinism.

A second type of potential attack is a massive intensification of the existing police repression, with large-scale induction of additional repressive forces. Already there have been certain attempts to whip up hysteria in the press that the Sangh is a PWG front which must be quickly suppressed. In this eventuality, the Sangh would have to be able to carry on mass work under extremely different conditions.

Studying the past history of people's struggles in Koraput region (particularly the struggles led by communist revolutionaries), one can see that it has been at such a juncture that many previous creditable efforts have collapsed, for various subjective reasons. Ensuring that such subjective factors are overcome and that the people's struggles are prepared for the challenging new developments -- this is the task of the near future.

Appendix: Brief summary of the current charter of demands of the Sangh

1. Scrap the GATT agreement.
2. Give land to the landless.

3. Make appropriate land records for land occupied and cultivated by tribals.

4. Return all illegal extractions made by settlement officials and carry out a fresh settlement.

5. Stop taking encroachment fines and give possession record on each encroached land to the cultivator.

6. If any land belonging to a poor peasant has to be given over for tree plantation on environmental grounds, he must be provided the same amount of land elsewhere. In acquisition of land for plantation, rich farmers' land should be acquired first.

7. Properly implement the law preventing non-tribals from purchasing tribal land. In spite of this law, thousands of acres of tribals' lands have gone into the hands of non-tribals.

8. Lands declared surplus should be distributed among the landless and poor peasantry.

9. There must be a pro-people literacy campaign and educational system, and a guarantee of the availability of teachers at primary schools.

10. Provide drinking water to every pada village.

11. Set up small and medium irrigation projects to provide water to all arable lands.

12. Strictly implement the minimum wages law, and provide equal wages to men and women.

13. Concede the tribals' rights over minor forest produce.

14. Set up Fair Price Shops at every panchayat level and provide rice at a maximum of Rs four per kg.

15. Jawahar Rozgar Yojana must be strictly implemented by village JRY committees. Wherever such committees are playing the role of agents to contractors, they must be abrogated.
16. Stop the cheating of tribals with regard to bank loans and LAMPS loans.
17. Abrogate the repressive Forest Act -- stop collection of illegal mamools by Revenue Inspectors and forest officers.
18. Stop all illegal panus (taxes).
19. Stop the zoolum by forest officials, police, and Revenue Inspectors.
20. Stop the exploitation of tribals by tradesmen purchasing products at very low rates. The Government has provided no substitute to the traders.
21. Provide a regular launch service to the Tapu area.
22. Provide fruit plants in Paplur to substitute ganja cultivation.
23. Provide land to those impoverished Bengali refugees who have no land as yet.
24. Give possession rights over land in Tapu area immediately.
25. Provide electricity to all villages who have lost land to electricity projects.
26. Open mining centres for extracting valuable stones, instead of allowing smugglers to operate here.
27. Provide boats to Paplur for fishing and communication.
28. Set up Primary Health Centres at every panchayat, and take action against health workers who abscond from their posts.
29. Stop all liquor centres.
30. Abrogate the New Economic Policies.
31. Provide jobs to the jobless tribals and Harijans.

32. Provide subsidised food and health care to bamboo coupe workers.
33. Withdraw police cases against Sangh activists. Withdraw all podu cases (against tribals for shifting cultivation).
34. Put an end to the harassment faced by Konda Dhura and Dhurua tribals in obtaining their caste certificates.
35. Make special arrangements for landless peasants who do not get tribal certificates because of lack of land.

Heroic Nellimarla Struggle and the Crucial Role of a Militant Solidarity Movement

-- by a correspondent

The struggle going on in Nellimarla jute mill, Vizianagaram dt, A.P., is a very significant one, particularly in the present context of the onslaught on the working class. The nature of the issues involved, the spirit shown by the workers of the mill, and the response of other workers all create scope for even further enhancing the significance of the struggle. There is also great significance in the support extended to the struggle by the peasantry from the surrounding villages, from which the workers hail. The need is for revolutionary forces to apply themselves to the task along the proper lines.

Nellimarla jute mill, in Nellimarla town (near Vizianagaram town), was set up in 1936 (it was known then as McLeod & Co.). Today, it employs in all 6,000 workers, of whom a considerable section are women. (There has always been a substantial section of badli workers, about 1000 to 1500.) McLeod also owned mills in nearby Chittivalasa, where the CPI led militant struggles in the 1940s. At the time the leadership in Nellimarla was Congress, but the workers here too benefited from the Chittivalasa workers' experience.

Since the 1970s Samba Siva Raju, a Congress leader (who is also a landlord) has been leader of the Congress union in Nellimarla. He is a minister in the present A.P. cabinet. In 1974 there was a confrontation between management and the workers, where the management had called the police; the police fired, killing four workers. The workers in retaliation killed the labour officer of the mill. (At the time the communist revolutionaries issued a leaflet discussing the problems of the workers, and the response of the State. It received a very positive response from the workers.)

Growing exploitation

In 1984, the mill was giving 60 to 65 tonnes of production a day; since 1989 this has risen to 70-75 tonnes a day; and the most recent production was 85-90 tonnes a day. Nevertheless the owner has been complaining that 'production is inadequate'. Till 1988 the owner was Kanoria; since then they have been talking of 'losses', and the mill has been leased by Kanoria to Govind Sharda of West Bengal. In 1988 itself the new management applied to BIFR for declaration as a sick mill, on the basis of which they wanted to get a loan of Rs eight crores. (They did not get it.)

Since 1988 the workers have been even further suffering for two reasons: first, in every 'slack season' the management simply locks out the workers for some months. There was a lock-out for eight months in 1989, continuing for another two months in 1990; in 1991 there was a five month lock-out; and in 1992 there was a

three month lock-out. Each time reasons have been given such as the workers' 'indiscipline' and the supposed shortfall in production targets.

The second means used to squeeze the workers is by extracting 'interest-free loans' from the workers to the tune of Rs five per day. This amount is cut from their salary. This was instituted in 1990 when, at the end of a 10-month lock-out, workers had in their anger burnt some buses. Samba Shiva Rao, local MLA, intervened, promised the workers that no cases would be filed against them, and that if they agreed to such deductions from their wages the mill would never close again. As it turned out, once the mill was reopened cases were filed against the workers, and despite the deductions the mill was locked out repeatedly thereafter -- now on the ground that they were not turning out 95 tonnes per day.

Entry of new leadership

It was in November 1991 that the IFTU (whose leadership is linked to CPI-ML T.N.D., popularly known as *Prajapandha*) made its entry into Nellimarla. When, in June 1992, the management locked out the mill, the workers began mass rallies in resistance. The union also approached the Government to get the lock-out reversed, and the Government did issue a GO banning the lock-out. The mill was reopened on September 1, 1992. (The conditions of the workers in this period had been so extreme that many workers got their fingers chopped off in order to claim accident compensation -- in fact, hospital records show that this had become routine.)

On July 5, 1993, the management declared lock-out once again. With this began a struggle that is continuing to date. Below, we are merely providing some significant dates which give a glimpse of this struggle.

On July 14 thousands rallied outside the district collector's office, and again on July 21 thousands rallied outside the mill at the time of the managing director's visit. He was gheraoed for 42 hours, and after mediation he finally promised that the salaries for June would be disbursed by July 31 (in fact, they were given only on August 7).

On September 13, workers carried out a "rasta roko", with women prominent in the action. The district collector was forced to promise that the workers would get wages for the lock-out period, and that if necessary the Government would even seize the millowner's property to pay for that. The road blockade was withdrawn on this assurance.

On October 7, the Chief Minister toured the area. Now, it needs to be remembered that since 1992 there had been regular meetings, rallies, and revolutionary cultural activity in the Nellimarla area. So when they heard that the CM was coming to the area, the workers were ready to stage a rally. However, the administration said, "if there is no rally, three persons will be allowed to meet the CM". On this basis, the leadership cancelled the rally. The CM promised the three persons that he would get the lock-out lifted. Nothing has come of that promise.

Thereafter, Samba Siva Rao began making preparations to split the union. In

response, the existing leadership went on a hunger-strike from October 23 to 27 to persuade the minister not to split the union. The tactic did not bring about any change of heart on the part of the minister.

The workers refused to buckle to repression. The workers declared they would rally before the Collector's office on November 11 to get the mill re-opened. The administration denied permission, and on November 10, arrested the president of the union. Nevertheless, on November 11, men and women workers and villagers of the region held the rally in defiance of the ban.

Meanwhile, Samba Siva Rao continued his campaign to split the workers. He wanted the workers to sign personal affidavits to the management promising the following:

1. We don't want lock-out wages for 1992;
2. we accept similar terms for 1993;
3. we won't interfere in any of the affairs of the company (in the 1992 lock-out, as in 1993, workers had obstructed transport of production for sale);
4. in production we'll work hard to the extent the management targets;
5. we agree to the deduction made of Rs five per day;
6. we will maintain discipline and fulfill production in the mill with concern for saving the management; etc.

When a certain number agreed to these terms, the management declared on November 14 that the mill would open on the 15th "without a siren" -- ie, not officially but "to maintain the mill" (oiling and so on). On the 16th thousands gathered at the mill gate anticipating that the mill would open and that they would enter. The

management allowed in only those who had signed the agreement. On November 20 the management declared that 1,400 workers had signed and entered. On November 22 they declared that 65 per cent had attended. The union leadership estimated that in fact about 30 per cent had attended (a minority section of the workers have not joined IFTU). The union filed a petition in the High Court against workers having to give such affidavits, and the High Court ruled on November 24 that in fact workers should be allowed in without such affidavits.

On November 29 the management closed the mill again, and said that they had not re-opened the mill, but were merely running it on a trial basis. At the end of 1993, a massive rally was held in Hyderabad in support of the Nellimarla workers. Yet after the Hyderabad rally too there was no concrete step from the Government or the management.

Continuing resistance

Throughout this period rallies, meetings and campaigns were going on regularly in Nellimarla itself as well as in the surrounding villages. The workers come from 31 villages in the region, and five villages are totally dependent on the mill. Without organising strong mass activity, Samba Siva Rao's hold would in fact have got strengthened; hence this rallying work was necessary even for the existence of the union. IFTU also has unions in Vizianagaram, Kottavalasa, and Salur, and 25 worker-activists of Nellimarla went to these regions to collect funds in January 1994. They also

came to Bobbili, where IFTU is not strong, but other revolutionary groups are working. Workers of these regions responded well to the campaign.

However, the union leadership has tended to campaign stressing that the Congress minister is the root of the whole problem. With this political approach, within the Congress itself there are enough opponents of the minister who can be mobilised to press for the re-opening. Telugu Desam leaders are also being mobilised in a similar fashion. While in the resolution of the specific dispute at hand it is inevitable that manoeuvring will have to be carried out with various political forces operating there, in the projection of the broad political content of the fight it is essential to bring to the fore the class fight -- in which all ruling class political forces are actually in the enemy camp.

On January 20 there was a big rally at Nellimarla -- 10,000 to 15,000 strong -- attended by various organisations, including the TDP. The union president declared that on January 25 the executive committee of IFTU would meet and decide the future course of the agitation. After this announcement surveillance was vigorous and widespread in the villages of the region.

Rail roko and firing

On January 28, when 200 workers came to the union office demanding some firm/militant action, the union president called them the next morning. The leaders present discussed and took certain decisions. The next morning 500 workers came to the office. A specific programme of

action was not announced, but the union leaders marched with the thronging workers in the direction of the railroad crossing, and squatted on the rail line.

Later, police forces came from Vizianagaram. Police officers and revenue officials negotiated with the union leadership, asking them to leave and discuss with them. However, the mood of the workers was militant, and the leaders refused to move. The police forces were increased. At 5.45 p.m. tear gas was used, but the brave workers remained steadfast. A lathi-charge ensued, but the workers, particularly the women, stood firm. They formed a shield around the union president. The police brutally attacked the workers, and beat the union president (in the course of the attack, a worker gave his life valiantly shielding the president). They dragged him and the women into the police van. The workers refused to be cowed down and began pelting stones. Then firing ensued.

In all 30 workers were injured. Five -- Kala Appala Satyanarayana, Nalla Mutyalanayadu, Kola Achapadu, Duvarakuchinna, and Kalluri Rambabu -- were martyred. The union president, Prasad, was beaten till he was unconscious. In the hospital, he and others were handcuffed to their beds.

Workers refuse to surrender

There were widespread protests in A.P. at this heinous act. Even the minister who had colluded with the management had to announce that the mill would be re-opened in two days. (Three months later, there is no sign of its re-opening.) Terror by

goons and the police in the villages is rampant, and arrests are continuing. On January 30, anticipating protests in the region, police simply did not allow people on the streets. Yet resistance was gathering. In Jarayapupeta, a workers' colony nearby, not even children were allowed out. Yet the women contacted each other from house to house, and suddenly surprised the police by coming out in a 200-strong march! The police were too stunned to react. After this action, people started to come out in protest.

Trade union leaders and APCLC activists came to cover the event, and visited the martyrs' villages. Such was the consciousness of the people that even the families of the martyrs, instead of projecting their own loss, expressed anxiety about the arrested leader Prasad! On the evening of January 29, a public meeting was arranged in a village from which three martyrs hailed.

A district-level trade union solidarity committee was formed, in which CITU and TDP-related forces did not take part. IFTU also organised a rally of over 1,000 Nellimarla workers in Calcutta, at the house of Govind Sharda. (The CPI-M government of course provided heavy police protection to Govind Sharda, who has defrauded the workers of Rs six crores of their PF dues, apart from lock-out wages and other legal dues!)

Beyond this, a few meetings in the region have been held. However, the tempo and militancy need to be greatly increased if the pressure is to be applied on the rulers to re-open the mill.

At the same time, there is news that

mediation efforts by the A.P. labour minister have failed because the management failed to turn up. The reason was revealed shortly thereafter when the news appeared that one Kanti Pugalia Associates of Delhi had purchased the unit from Kanoria! Now the Government invited Pugalia and co. to attend the talks.

Broader significance

This brief narration of the heroic Nellimarla struggle brings out certain striking features of the present situation. First, the scale of the attack on the working class: already in miserable conditions, the workers are being asked to submit to even more humiliating terms with threats of starvation. This is being enforced with police and goonda terror on the one hand and splittist activities on the other.

Secondly, despite the scale of the attack, and despite the threat of starvation, the workers have shown remarkable courage, militancy and steadfastness in their fight. (The Congress minister is trying to oust Prasad with the notion that if Prasad is ousted, the wakening consciousness of the workers would also be smashed. But he cannot succeed!) In the context of the overall industrial policy and the current attacks on the working class, this militancy has *political importance*. This is an indication of the future of working class activity.

Thirdly, given the overall condition of the working class, where large numbers of workers are facing similar threats and humiliation, there is vast scope and need

to organise militant solidarity activity in support of such struggles. For one, the Nellimarla struggle cannot win on its own: any partial victory can come only if there is support from wider and wider sections of toiling people, and the ruling classes are placed on the political defensive. For this it is crucial that other sections of people are reached with this message, the commonality of their interests is revealed, and their support is obtained on this basis: in other words, the fight must be made into an increasingly political fight (in the proper sense of the term).

It is note-worthy that while the TDP and anti-Samba Siva Rao Congress sections claim to be supporting the Nellimarla struggle, they in fact try to *confine* the activity of the workers. This is only to be expected of them, and they need in fact to be exposed before the workers. It is upto the revolutionaries to relate the problems faced by the workers of Nellimarla to those faced by workers elsewhere, and hence to enhance the general impact of the specific struggle, and heighten the class consciousness of the working class.

Unfortunately, not all revolutionary forces have taken up this task with the requisite seriousness. In several cases we find that revolutionaries treat solidarity actions with the Nellimarla struggle as if this would mean endorsing the overall tactical line of the political group involved directly in that struggle. It is politically important for all revolutionaries to fight such tendencies, and to realise instead that by neglecting solidarity for the people's revolutionary

struggles (whatever the limitations of specific leaderships) we are in fact losing an important opportunity.

To illustrate this last point, below we describe some activities carried out in Bobbili, an important town of Vizianagaram district.

Solidarity from a correct class perspective

The Workers' Revolutionary Council of Bobbili consciously took up activity in support of the Nellimarla workers. It brought out three leaflets -- one dated 23/9/93, another dated 19/12/93, and a third dated 31/1/93. 5,000 copies of the first two leaflets were brought out, and 10,000 copies of the third. The first two were distributed in the Nellimarla region, as well as in Bobbili. The leaflets were very well received by the workers, and though the second leaflet was very long (four pages), the villagers ploughed their way through all of it because of the nature of its contents.

15,000 copies of the third leaflet were printed: 5,000 were distributed in Bobbili, Nellimarla, and Vizianaram, and the remaining 10,000 at the CPI-CPI(M) rally held at Vijayawada. The leaflet on the one hand exposed the Government, which in response to the workers' demand for their jobs gave them bullets. On the other hand, the leaflet showed how a massive solidarity effort was required, and how it was being prevented by class collaborationists (this was aimed against the revisionist parties). The class collabo-

rationist trade union leaders were refusing to organise solidarity even after 200 days of lock-out, starvation of workers, repression, firings....

What was distinct about all three leaflets was that they emphasized not merely the immediate issue, or the immediate political leaders who were directly responsible, but attempted further to heighten the political orientation of the workers in struggle. The leaflets dealt with the issue not merely as a trade union problem, but as an issue of the working class movement. This distinct approach greatly enthused the comrades involved in this activity.

Apart from this, on January 2, the Rice Mill Workers' Union, the Masonry Women Workers' Union, and the jute mill workers of Bobbili undertook a solidarity rally at Bobbili, about 300 strong. The rally was a success despite the fact that the city trade union council had not cooperated. Thereafter, a team of 28 workers of IFTU came from Nellimarla to mobilise funds and campaign on this issue. The above-named unions arranged for their effective propaganda, and a sum of about Rs 4,000 was collected.

As a result of this preparatory activity, after the firing, on February 2, a militant protest rally of 3,000 workers could be organised in Bobbili. A situation was created whereby no union could stay out. All Bobbili jute mill workers, irrespective of union affiliations, gave one day's salary to the martyrs of Nellimarla. A sum of Rs 13,000 was collected, which was presented to the martyrs' families by a delegation from

Bobbili.

These activities not only served to boost the Nellimarla union as it faced repression; they also served to greatly enthuse and heighten the class consciousness of the workers of Bobbili. At the same time the nature of the activity and propaganda projected a distinct political understanding differing in certain respects from that projected by the leadership of the Nellimarla struggle. In fact these activities gave an overall boost to the revolutionary working class activities in Bobbili itself.

Report from Punjab

A Valiant Fight for Land and for the Right to Struggle

-- a correspondent

It is more than a year now that the agricultural labourers (belonging to the Harijan community) of Balahr Vinjhu (district Bathinda) have been continuing their struggle for 18 acres of Nazool land of the village. It is the land that they have been collectively cultivating since 1947. And it is the land that cannot be leased or sold to anyone other than those belonging to the Harijan community according to the concerned laws of the Government itself. It was this rightful and lawful claim of theirs on this land that made these agricultural labourers highly resentful of the decision of the Government to sell it through open auction, and that pushed them towards getting organised and taking to the path of struggle under the leadership of the Punjab Khet Majdoor Union (PKMU).

In the very initial phase of the struggle none seemed opposed to their rightful claim. Rather, the concerned revenue officer (tehsildar) had promised, in full view of and with the unanimous consent of the whole village, that this land would be sold to the Harijan commu-

nity of the village on the next date of the auction. But soon after, the struggle faced very heavy odds. There were two reasons for the sudden change: One, the Congress (I) leaders of the area saw in the success of the struggle, and the resultant establishment of the PKMU in the area, a potential threat to their social dominance and their vote bank among the Harijan community of the area as a whole. So they started playing tricks. They 'advised' the labourers not to be 'instigated' by the 'outsiders', and promised the distribution of land through the agency of their ministers. This way they expected to divide the labourers and to isolate the leadership of the PKMU from among them. Two, the district administration also did not like such a precedent to be set and such a militant union to get a foothold in the area where Nazool and Government lands are lying in plenty in almost every village. So it started adopting, with the backing of the Congress (I) bosses in the capital, repressive measures in the form of harassment, arrests, torture and repression on PKMU leaders and banning assemblies. Their explicit purpose was to suppress the struggle with force.

It goes to the credit of the correct orientation, mass approach and tactful handling of the critical situations by the leadership of the struggle, that the struggle could not only foil the conspiracy of the Congress (I) leaders and successfully withstand the repressive measures of the district administration, but could also develop both in depth and expansion.

Such was the situation of the struggle,

as it stood at the end of the year 1993.

Open ganging-up of the enemies of the struggle

Having failed in their attempts to divide or suppress the agricultural labourers during the latter half of 1993, the Congress (I) leaders of the area and the district authorities openly ganged up, in the beginning of 1994, with the local chieftain (the sarpanch of the village) for launching a combined assault on the agricultural labourers and their movement. And as a planned move, they sold the said land through an open auction to the brother of the sarpanch and three others of his clique at very cheap rates. This they did on 27th January with the help of a huge deployment of the police force and despite the protests of the Harijan community of the village. But the agricultural labourers were not deterred from the path of struggle. They relied on the mass mobilisation of the area even as they went to the Punjab and Haryana High Court and brought from there clear instructions to the administration that it should not dispossess the agricultural labourers of the land until the matter is finally decided. The court decision further enthused the labourers in struggle while it demoralised the sarpanch clique.

The agricultural labourers were then faced with the question of taking possession of the land. They decided in the community meeting of the village that they would take possession by irrigating the land on the due date (for irrigating

it). On the other hand, the sarpanch clique started issuing threats against their doing so. Not bothering about the threats of the clique, a contingent of 70-80 men and as many women of the Harijan community, along with 8 to 10 men from the jaat peasantry, armed with traditional weapons, arrived at the fields on the due date. The sarpanch clique, accompanied by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), the Deputy Superintendent of Police and 60-70 armed policemen, also arrived at the scene.

On reaching the spot, the S.D.M. ordered the agricultural labourers and the peasants to disperse -- barring four or five of them who were asked to remain there for talks. But none moved an inch. The sarpanch used abusive language and issued threats to the labourers -- in the very presence of the authorities, who remained mere mute spectators to all this! The labourers kept restraint: they recognised that it was a planned provocation for a clash with them so as to give the police an excuse to intervene on behalf of the sarpanch clique. Finally, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate announced his decision that the labourers shall not be allowed to take possession of the land. His false plea was that the order did not clearly mention which specific land was being referred to. Then he asked four or five from among the gathering to reach the police station so that the issue may be amicably settled.

The agricultural labourers were apprehensive of the intentions of the authorities. They took the S.D.M.'s word to be in fact a plan to arrest their leaders and

implicate them in false cases. So all of them reached the police station. As was expected, nothing came out of these 'talks'. At this, the labourers showed their resentment by raising slogans against the district authorities. They then insisted that a case be lodged against the sarpanch for using abusive language and for issuing threats to the labourers in the fields. This the authorities were forced to do after much hesitation.

In the next two or three days, the representatives of the labourers met the district authorities. The district authorities themselves were not prepared to implement the court order on various false pleas. One of these pleas was that the matter is sub-judice, and no one may cultivate the land until it is finally decided by the court. But when their attention was drawn to the clear instructions of the High Court for not dispossessing the labourers of the land, they changed their plea to saying that the land was not Nazool land, rather it was a Government provincial land which can be sold through open auction. This again was a blatant lie, because the auction order of the same authorities had itself referred to it as Nazool land. Thus, the anti-labour class character and role of the district authorities was fully exposed for all to see.

Struggle for the right to struggle

This situation left the labourers no option but to go to the High Court for a

clearer verdict and compel the authorities to implement it, on the one hand, and, on the other, go to the people of the area again for mobilising them by exposing the anti-people character and role of the district authorities and so build further pressure for getting their just demand conceded.

As the culminating step to this mobilisation, the PKMU decided to hold a state-level conference on 1st July, in the village Balahr Vinjhu itself. However, on 30th June, the district authorities banned the holding of the peaceful conference there, imposed section 144 of Cr.P.C., and rushed 300 to 400 security men to seal off all the entry-points to the village. Thus, through this repressive step, the labourers were denied their democratic right to struggle.

The labourers of Balahr Vinjhu and their Union took up the challenge of the authorities and decided to continue the struggle, though they made some adjustments in its form. As a first step, a batch of about 150 labourers and employees supporting their cause demonstrated at the district headquarters itself and condemned the repressive step of the authorities. Secondly, the venue of the state conference was shifted to another village of the area, Sevewala, where about 1000 labourers, including the representatives of various fraternal mass organisations (such as BKU led by Jhanda Singh Jethuke, Kirti Majdoor Union [from Rampura area], industrial workers from Ludhiana, roadways workers, head-load workers, and other employees, etc.) participated. There resolutions were passed supporting the

Balahr Vinjhu labourers' struggle and condemning the district authorities; effigies of the sarpanch, of the district authorities, and of the Punjab government were burnt; and the road traffic was blocked for one hour. Thirdly, about 100-125 people held a protest rally in Balahr Vinjhu village itself.

A more bitter expression of their resentment against the repression by the district authorities was the following two incidents: One, as mentioned earlier, all entry-points to the village had been sealed off on the day of the meeting with a huge deployment of the force there. An angry batch of men and women from the Harijan community went to one of the check posts and so harshly reprimanded the force present there for blocking their way to the fields, that the force had to vacate the post! In the second incident, one of the labourers was detained by the police on the excuse that he was active in delivering messages for the rally in the village. Within minutes 150-200 of the men and women from the community rushed to the spot and gheraoed the jeep in which the boy was detained. Many hot words were exchanged with the policemen present, and within the span of a few minutes the boy was got freed. Later on, one of the policemen was heard saying, "What is the use of imposing sec.144 in such situations, the Government just earned a bad name for doing so for nothing!"

In the next 15 days, several small incidents occurred, reflecting the people's resolve to continue the fight and asserting their right to struggle (such as getting their boys freed from the police

under mass pressure, on two occasions, and on another occasion thrashing two miscreants from the sarpanch clique, etc). Yet the most militant and concerted expression of their resolve to continue the fight, and of their assertion of their right to struggle, was on 15th July when about 200 of the enraged and furious men and women from the Harijan community of the village held a militant demonstration in the district courts of Bathinda. They demonstrated there for about four hours, raising militant slogans and fiery speeches in which they condemned the Punjab government, the district authorities, the Congress (I) leaders of the area in the harshest possible terms. They exposed their anti-people character and role in no uncertain terms, and declared their unrelenting resolve to fight to the finish for their demands and their rights. It was in this form that they gave a 'memorandum' to the district authorities on that day. And it was in this form that they asserted, and enjoyed, their right to struggle, in practice.