



Glimpses of the massive gathering of Lok Morcha (Punjab) at Selbrah (Bathinda), March 31, 1996.

the Comrade

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What the Lok Sabha elections tell us

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The 1996 Lok Sabha Elections and What They Tell Us

The enormously expensive election process at the cost of the Indian people to elect the eleventh parliament of the country has yielded a hung parliament. To the usual hidden expenses of electioneering in a thoroughly non-democratic society will have been added two other onerous expenditure heads: the Election Commission's complicated procedural acrobatics to make out fair play; and the Military's wide deployment in whole regions unwilling to go to the polls to enforce "people's participation" there.

A hung parliament is becoming a familiar sight at the end of the Indian ruling classes' exercise to invest themselves with a popular mandate to rule. Within a short span of seven years since 1989, this is the third hung parliament in succession and the fifth minority government at the centre. It would have been nearly a month before the Lok Sabha gave a vote of confidence to a government formed from within itself. Meanwhile a minority government (of BJP and its allies) had already come and gone within a fortnight, leaving behind another "ex-Prime Minister" for the nation to look after. Such is the massive disillusionment of the electorate and the indecisiveness and tussle among the rulers themselves as to who should govern. This is so, even when, the rulers are all agreed on the basic economic programme of continuing to tailor the Indian economy to the needs of international finance capital.

Still, political parties of the ruling classes, their imperialist masters, and the ruling class media have been quite profuse in their tributes to the "maturity of the Indian voters" and the "flourishing democracy" that is India. The major political formations in Parliament, meanwhile, contending to form a government somehow, have been unabashedly interpreting and laying claims to the "people's verdict". Actually, the election results have disappointed them all -- the ruling classes as a whole as well as each of their main electoral race-horses favoured in descending order by them: the Congress led by Mr P.V. Narasimha

Rao; the BJP-Shiv Sena combine; and the Janata Dal-Left Front-SP alliance.

The ruling classes, particularly the big bourgeoisie and the foreign speculators, primarily wished for a stable central government to emerge at the end of these elections. They were apprehending the prospect of another hung parliament. Yet they had hoped that the Congress or the I.P. allies might be able to approximate a majority position in Parliament. If these parties had approximated a majority, it would not have been difficult to convert that into an actual majority or a workable majority given the flourishing parliamentary market of India. The ruling classes could then vigorously carry on their plunderous activities without having to worry for some time about any fluctuation of economic policies or measures owing to pressures of electoral politics. But the election results belied their hope and frustrated their primary wish to get a stable central government.

In fact, concealing their immediate disappointment and anxiety about the growing fragmentation of their polity and about the political disillusionment of the common people, the ruling classes are throwing out such hypocritical phrases as "maturity of Indian voters" merely for popular consumption. They are trying to flatter the suffering, divided, confused, wary, disgusted, angry and coerced masses of Indian voters into believing the myth of popular vote-power. Hence, whichever way the Indian voters may act, howsoever they may find that exercise devoid of any meaningful choice and hope, they will get this mock-certificate of "maturity" from the ruling classes and their media so long as they continue to act as voters.

Claims regarding the "people's verdict"

More ridiculous are the claims of the three major political formations in the present parliament about the "people's verdict" in their respective favour. So evidently untenable are those claims that each side has found it quite easy and convenient in the debate to make mince-meat of the others' claims about the "people's verdict" while being evasive and shifty in defending its own claim.

In terms of numerical strength in the Parliament, none of the major political formations has got past the one-third mark of the total seats in the Lok Sabha. Given that situation, the parliamentary wind-bags could hardly shout away the reality that none of them would be able to form a government without having to solicit the support of a rival political formation against whom it had just recently sought the "people's verdict". In other words, any one of them invoking the "people's verdict" for the purpose of forming the government would have to either trample upon the same "people's verdict" for achieving

that end or give up the contention for forming the government and thus cancel its claim to the "people's verdict". Undeterred by such a discouraging reality of their situation, they were engaged, for a month-long period, in competitively chanting their respective versions of the "people's verdict". Which only shows the extent of the shameless audacity these political parties have developed through their electioneering practice in our country's semi-feudal socio-political atmosphere.

In terms of electoral political planks too, the laboured interpretations of the "people's verdict" according to the immediate convenience of the concerned political formation are equally groundless. Some of these interpretations which are much tossed about are as follows: It is "a vote for a coalition government"; it is "a verdict in favour of the secular forces as against the communal forces"; and it is "an assertion of the federal urge by the people". The diffusedness and inconsistency of the electoral planks of all the contending political formations, their actual election performances, and their post-election acrobatics -- all tell a different tale.

Significance of the downslide of the Congress

The Congress led by P.V. Narasimha Rao -- the most eager initiator of the new economic policy whose alacrity earned it early support from U.S. imperialism to establish its credentials in parliament at the start of the nineties -- got a drubbing in these elections as never before. Its shifting plank in the course of electioneering to salvage its traditional support base among people did little to save it. Primarily, it projected itself as the herald of a new dawn of affluence with liberalisation, of which the bright rays would percolate into the abyss where the toiling people have been immediately hurled by the same policies. However, seeking to mollify the growing anguish and opposition among the toiling masses on this account, it talked of giving a "human face" to the new economic policies and measures. (That way, it implicitly conceded the essentially inhuman nature of what it has been implementing for the last five years.) At other times, it projected itself as the only guarantor of law and order and secular polity -- claims which those who had been through the horrors of Ayodhya and other pogroms of the decade and those affected by the cynically unredressed massacre of Sikhs in Delhi repulsed with all the hatred of the betrayed. On convenient occasions, it also tried to steal the "social justice" plank of its electoral adversaries so as to shore up its dwindling vote-bank among the scheduled castes. On the other hand, it castigated the "caste-ist forces" so as not to displease the upper caste voters. Despite all that, it got a severe rebuff from the electorate and found itself cut down to half its earlier size in parliament. So, it has no

ground for justifying its post-election manoeuvres with reference to any kind of "people's verdict".

The present slump in the fortunes of the Congress is not a superficial phenomenon which may be ascribed to the particular circumstances of these elections. It is a dramatic expression of the general political drift of the Congress party. The Indian National Congress, the oldest and most tested political representative of the Indian ruling classes, is in irreversible political decline. It may or may not be able to recover some bits of its lost electoral ground in the period ahead. In any case, it can no more stall or even slow down the unfolding process of decay or disintegration of its old political identity as an all-India ruling class party -- i.e. as the party capable of forging under its umbrella a broad social coalition of various ruling class sections and other vested interest-groups and also capable of presenting before the countrymen a politically attractive programme or leadership to ensure a countrywide support-base and to check the centrifugal tendencies in the social coalition. This political development, which has got underlined by these elections, is worth noticing. It is worth noticing because the process of withering away of the Congress as an all-India party epitomizes the organic crisis of the ruling class parliamentary politics. Moreover, the Congress's present political predicament as an all-India political party of the ruling classes is essentially shared by the other political formations too who aspire to replace the Congress. While the Congress is going downhill, having almost exhausted its political ability to cope with the increasingly conflicting demands of serving its social base and pleasing its political support-base, the other aspirants are getting stuck in their efforts to attain that all-India stature because of their inability to cope with the same baffling problem.

Desperation of the BJP

Of the two other major political formations of the ruling classes who aspire to step into the shoes of the Indian National Congress, the BJP is the more ambitious, loud and desperate one. Smelling the growing rot in the Congress and the persisting inability of the "social justice" camp of the JD-LF-SP alliance to close their ranks and gain the electoral initiative, the BJP this time made an all-out bid to come to power at the centre. The outcome has been far from satisfactory when measured against the set target and the roused expectations of its rank and file. The fact of being the largest single party in the parliament but still with just 161 seats in its kitty can be a source of little solace for a party dying to be in power at the earliest.

The BJP was the first to start the clamour about the "people's mandate", in the context of pressing its claim as the largest single

party in Parliament who should be invited by the President to form the government. Once it got the opportunity to form the government and to show that it enjoyed the confidence of the majority in the Lok Sabha, however, that argument became irrelevant. Thereafter, the BJP's attempt to cover its failure to gather the requisite support for sustaining its government in Parliament by crying hoarse about the implied violation of people's mandate has been simply absurd. The BJP leadership is not so naive as to think that the technical status of being the largest single party in a hung parliament by itself involves any claim whatsoever on the support from other parties for sustaining its minority government. Obviously, with that assumed look of a victim, it has been playing to the gallery, particularly to its own constituency. It has been doing so mainly with a view to keeping the minds of its followers and supporters away from the depressing truth about the intrinsic nature of its failure to make the national grade.

Actually, the election results and the post-election developments have served to underline the serious limitations of the present-day BJP to measure up to the ambitious political project it has undertaken -- namely, to emerge as an all-India ruling class party capable of governing the country on its own. The sizeable support-base it has been able to build up during the past decade is still too narrow, in territorial or social spread, to carry the BJP to its goal. Further expansion of this support-base has become an uphill task as the BJP finds itself at the end of its fast-lane drive to mobilise sectarian support. Under a particular set of social political circumstances, that drive was fuelled by the religious and communal frenzy worked up around the Babri Masjid-Ram Janam Bhoomi quarrel and by the violent fit of upper-caste reaction against the reservation policy for the OBCs. Once those issues got exhausted of their excitative potential, all subsequent attempts by the BJP to reproduce that communal-sectarian frenzy on the same or similar issues have been unfruitful.

Hence, in the recent period, it has been engaged in cautiously shifting the focus of its communal mobilisation from overtly religious issues onto those which can be presented as issues of national concern, even when they have an anti-Muslim edge: Abrogation of Article 370 concerning the special status of Kashmir, enactment of a Common Civil Code, and expulsion of Bangla Deshi citizens illegally residing in India, etc. This attempted shift in the focus of its communal mobilisation reflects the difficulty in converting the phenomenon of Hindu religious revival into a communal constituency beyond a certain limit in a short span of time. The difficulty in speedily developing the religio-communal polarisation is made acute by the other social, economic and regional polarisations which too are developing simul-

taneously. Keeping that reality in mind, the BJP has also been struggling, of late, to dilute its anti-lower-caste image and to expand into other sections and areas beyond the existing range of its support-base by taking up some economic and local issues. However, all these efforts of the BJP do not add up to a comprehensive political appeal so as to get a countrywide support-base and to overcome the critical problem of getting social or political allies.

Its shifting planks during electioneering reflected the pressures the BJP felt in gathering its support-base among the people even as it had to show its subservient credentials to the imperialist powers and agencies. One could witness its shifting stand on Enron through its various Sangh Parivar organs (its Swadeshi plank in this instance) and the steadfast betrayal by the party of its original promise on the issue as government partner in Maharashtra. It tried, as a major poll-plank, its promise of developing Hindutva and on such basis consolidating national integration (which is to be enforced with greater brutality in Kashmir and the North-East), while also claiming to encompass all communities within itself. At times, it brandished its national chauvinism vis-a-vis Pakistan from a Hindu communal angle and its hard stand on nuclear armaments for India to earn national support. However, knowing that this kind of patriotic demagoguery might not be taken kindly by the imperialist masters just when the latter were keen to show compliance on the NPT in South Asia, the BJP also sent high-powered emissaries abroad to reassure compliance on the economic and political agenda charted by U.S. imperialism in the main. It even resorted to the tactical ploy of giving 'a liberal face to the Hindutva crusade' by deploying the mealy-mouthed Atal Bihari Vajpayee as its front-man for netting extra votes and allies. After all that exercise in double-tongued politicking, and still uncertain of the impact on the voters, the BJP finally had to fall back heavily on the favourite plank of all the ruling class opposition parties: viz., making a show of combatting the rampant corruption in high circles of government.

Unblushing opportunism

In the end, the so-called United Front -- a parliamentary formation openly cobbled together around the JD-LF-SP combine for gaining the 'gaddi' -- has managed to form the government, albeit a particularly weak one. The people have witnessed how this government could come into being only by default. The Congress and the BJP as the main contestants could neither support each other's bid for governmental power nor get the required support from the Third Front or the regional parties for reasons already mentioned. With the front-runners getting out, the Third Front got the chance as the contender left in the field

for forming the government. The people have witnessed how the Third Front, despite resorting to 'political liberalisation' by inviting all and sundry for partnership in its venture of coalition government and giving the attractive name of United Front to that opportunistic combination, could not surpass even the score of the BJP and co., not to speak of the required number of M.P.s for forming the government. The minority United Front government could get itself installed only after going through the humiliation of soliciting the support of the Congress led by P.V. Narasimha Rao -- one of the declared main enemies of the JD-LF-SP combine, in the electoral battle. Behaving as if the people have not seen all that happening in full public view, the leaders of the United Front have been talking big without a trace of a blush on their faces. They have been trying not only to justify somehow their unprincipled partnership in the power-chase as political tactics but also to pass off this self-serving political arrangement as the fulfilment of the people's will.

Had the United Frontwallas been able to form the government on their own, their defence of this opportunistic political patch-work might have become plausible. But no rationalisation can cover their self-exposing deed of reaching the government-seat by climbing on the soiled shoulders of the Rao-led Congress. They have committed this political misdeed under the false pretext of keeping the BJP out of governmental power at the centre. They have arbitrarily made out the project of keeping the BJP out of power to be the principal political issue before the whole country, to suit their own political convenience. The CPM general secretary H.S. Surjeet (while coming out from Rashtrapati Bhavan as a partner of the Third Front delegation) spoke to the media persons in front of the T.V. cameras: There is no other issue, all other issues are relegated by the main issue of preventing the BJP from forming the government. In a similar vein, the Janata Dal president Laloo Prasad Yadav said in a T.V. interview: This is the most important matter now that the country has to be saved.

They alone would deem it sufficient rationalisation of their unprincipled conduct, to raise the spectre of the BJP government. Not even all of their own followers are taken in by that trick and these days the public is a tougher customer. The sky would not have fallen if the BJP government had come into being. That minority government would have been as rickety as the present U.F. government, and likewise incapable of carrying out any substantive legislative or administrative measure without the support of parliamentary forces outside the government. Moreover, the U.F. leaders have been shirking from explaining why it was necessary to form a hotch-potch government with Congress support even for preventing the BJP government. These

parties did in fact attain their professed objective merely by withholding their support to the BJP's attempt at government. So, the U.F. leaders must have realised that any sort of try at explaining the necessity of their government-forming would involve unavoidable self-contradiction. If they were to say that installing of the government somehow was necessary to ward off unwanted immediate mid-term polls, that would contradict their pretext of preventing the BJP government being the main issue. That would also imply that they can be expected frequently to indulge in such an unprincipled conduct row when problems like a hung parliament and unwanted mid-term polls are to be faced by them more often than not. If they were to admit that the lure of assured and greater access to governmental power was essential as a means to keep their motley crew intact and unavailable to the BJP, that would contradict their claim about the secularist or anti communal credentials and motivation of the political parties which have been rallied into a parliamentary bloc against the B.P.

Bogus arguments about "regional mandate"

Among the United Front's laboured interpretations of the "people's verdict" is one claiming that the greater weightage in the hung Parliament for the regional parties represents an assertion of the people's urge for federalism. Four parties -- the TDP, the TMC, the DMK and the AGP -- have thus arrogated to themselves the name-plate of "Federal Front".

If it were indeed so, the regional parties should at the very least found themselves in significantly larger numbers in the Lok Sabha. But this is not so. The numerical strength of the parties with "regional mandate" is no real improvement over their past performance. Not even the "Federal Front" parties have done better. The DMK as a part of Tamil Nadu has more or less replaced the AIADMK in parliamentary representation. The Tamil Manila Congress in any case is no regional party but a last-minute splintered fragment from the Congress (just as the Madhya Pradesh Vikas Party and the Tiwari Congress are breakaways from that national party). The TDP of Andhra Pradesh has notched up a few seats over the last Lok Sabha only. In any case only the AGP of Assam, from among the four "Federal Front" parties, operates in a region whose population has grievances based on objective official neglect and discrimination against it. None of the remaining regional parties has performed better in absolute terms: The Akali Dal, who had won nine parliamentary seats in the past, has regained eight seats now. JMM got a drubbing in these elections. The Haryana Vikas Party, with three seats, is not a patch on the past performance of Chaudhary Devi Lal's party boosted by the "Nyaye Yudh" for Haryana. And

Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party is a remnant of the old socialist party conglomerate and a regional party merely in the sense of having its representatives mainly from Uttar Pradesh. Shiv Sena is a sort of regional party but it is opposed to federalism.

What the relatively greater weight and share of the regional parties in the central government indicates, then, is not their own better vote-performance and increased popularity but rather the dismal performance of the national parties and the destabilising dilemmas faced by them in simultaneously coalescing their social base and convincing their support base. The present political manoeuvrability thus gained by the regional parties can at the most be of some benefit to their social base among the local ruling classes. Insofar as there is any differentiation between these regional parties and other ruling class parties, it is that primary among the local interests they represent and serve are the local feudal interests.

Such basically anti-democratic political parties can not represent the democratic federal aspirations of the people of the different regions.

Some features of the people's mood

A few features stand out as indicative of the people's mood which found general expression in their lack of enthusiasm for the elections and the contestants, and in the election results too.

The phenomenon of the negative vote -- the vote that is cast to trounce a hated party or candidate irrespective of the merits of those who manage to get it -- continued to prevail in one form or the other. For instance, this was evident in the rout of the Jayalalitha regime in Tamil Nadu, or in the targetting of the Rao-led Congress by considerable sections of some religious minorities. More significant, however, is the turn this phenomenon has taken from being a simple negative vote to becoming a complex negative vote, owing to the generalised distrust of parliamentary parties. It may be called a negative-cum-reluctant vote -- a vote that is reluctantly cast for this or that disliked party against a more disliked party. For instance, a lot of urban voters in West Bengal, who are quite disillusioned with the Left Front government, reluctantly voted for it owing to their greater aversion for the Congress and the BJP. The reluctant vote, as an additional dimension of the negative vote, actually indicates the deepened negative content of the voting, on the whole. That is so because the reluctant vote expresses, more or less, the negative attitude of the voter towards those against whom and for whom the vote is cast. Yet, as its apparent form is positive, it gives a misleading impression regarding the real mood of the voters. The reluctant vote

is also an important factor underlying the increase in the pre-poll uncertainty about the eventual conduct of the voters.

Even unsystematic stray reports in the bourgeois press could not but let out the fact that the tendency to resort to election boycott is also growing among the people. During the recent elections, there were a number of incidents of boycott, attempted boycott or threatened boycott of elections in different parts of the country. For instance, in Andhra 27 Telangana villages boycotted the elections despite the State repressive machinery being bent on making people vote. In the Kashmir valley the massive boycott effort was smothered by means of an unprecedented terror-campaign which the death-squads of the Rashtriya Rifles and of the State-sponsored "renegade militants" had carried out. In Karnataka, 19 villages in 5 constituencies boycotted the elections. In Rajasthan, in 18 booths people refused to vote. In Meghalaya, people in 3 areas boycotted the elections. In Uttarakhand region of U.P., election boycott was attempted. In Arunachal Pradesh, threat of election boycott was held out by a state-level students organisation. Besides, in M.P.'s Bastar district, known for its Naxalite activity among the people, only 35 percent voted. In Bihar, in 14 tribal-dominated areas, the average polling was 45 percent. In the latter two cases, though, it is not clear how far the low percentage of voting was due to some people having boycotted the elections. This incomplete account of such incidents indicates how the resentment among the people is running high and their patience running short as the elections come and go leaving them stuck with their burning problems. Even so, leaving out the cases of the Telangana villages and the Kashmir valley where higher political stakes were involved in the boycott of elections by the people, the afore-mentioned incidents happened to be cases of using the boycott only as a weapon of protest or pressure, for the redressal of specific grievances or problems of the people concerned. As such, these boycott actions or attempts fall within the orbit of parliamentary politics, that is why the boycott of voting can easily alternate with the use of voting for similar, specific purposes.

Anyhow, the people in large parts of the country generally showed their propensity to take part in voting rather than not; although the listless manner of their involvement in the election process indicated that they were also not keen to do so. The interaction between the parliamentary parties and the masses of people was a dull affair too because people showed little interest in the national agenda of these parties and wanted to hear from them about the immediate problems haunting the people, whereas the parties had nothing substantial or convincing to offer on such problems. Overall it looked as if the

common man is just hanging on to his vote as the only claim left to him within the political system.

The real message of the recent elections

Thus, the recent elections have underlined the crucial fact of the present political situation that the overwhelming majority of the people do not identify with these political parties, do not trust them, do not want them and wish to know how to do without them.

Elections today, they generally know, is not the way. All the same, they will continue or fall back on using their votes to whatever little purpose they can think of so long as they do not have a tangible assurance of the revolutionary struggle alternative. They need, but do not have before them in good measure, the demonstration of mass revolutionary activity which can step by step lead them to practise real democracy through their own political mass organisations -- the nuclei of popular power against the concrete manifestations of the power of the ruling classes, and ultimately their state power itself. To move away from the present parliamentary system and towards real democracy -- people's democracy -- people must taste their preliminary democracy day to day through their struggle organisations. They must know their organised mass power and its democratic nature. They must know the democratic role of their organised mass power by seeing it make their just say prevail progressively in matters concerning their work and life. They must know the democratic type of their organised mass power by seeing their enlightened say prevail in the building and use of this power.

It is this knowledge in practice of the rudiments of real democracy in their service, the people need as direly as they need the broad conception of real democracy with its ramifications corresponding to various spheres of their social life. It is this that will develop in their minds a feeling^{ing} for revolution and a yearning for knowledge of what is to be done and how. It is this that will help them perceive the truth that no power flows from the available vote but the vote flows from the available power. And all that will make them contemptuous of today's toy-vote, handed over to them by the ruling classes, and make them eager to discard it for acquiring the real vote -- ie, their real say in all the affairs of society and government -- and for acquiring the necessary power that would sanction their real vote.

For communist revolutionaries and revolutionary democrats, the essential message of the recent elections too is clear:

Do not tail the people by muddling on with electoral politics, with no definite conception or evidence of the gain to the revolutionary movement, organised power and consciousness of the people.

Do not rush the people by giving calls for general boycott of elections, with no definite conception or evidence of the level of revolutionary movement, organised power and consciousness required for the people to do it and follow it up as a consistent plan of action.

Earnestly respond to the people's crucial political need for a positive alternative by concentrating on building the alternative revolutionary democratic movement, leadership and power and projecting the revolutionary alternative of the People's Democracy. All along, continue to expose the anti-democratic political power, electoral system, parties and politics of the ruling classes with reference to this positive alternative; with reference to the people's positive experience of the rudimentary real democracy they are cultivating in their revolutionary movement and their negative experience of the present so-called democracy.

"There is a number of the CPI(M) leaders here who think that Mr Jyoti Basu should have accepted the offer to lead an United Front Government. 'If we are waiting for a revolution to take us to Delhi, we are being stupid', opined a senior Marxist leader."

-- *The Statesman*, June 5, 1996

"... we are fully supporting the Government. We are there in the United Front, we play an important role in gathering all these forces. So it does not make any difference our joining or not joining."

-- Harkishen Singh Surjeet, CPI(M) General Secretary, in an interview with *Asian Age*, August 24, 1996

Down with this ban!

Build the mass revolutionary movement and its forces to resist this suppression of the people's revolutionary urge!

The ban on the CPI(ML) - People's War Group in Andhra Pradesh, imposed in July 1996 by the TDP government of Chandrababu Naidu is an integral part of the duplicity and terror tactics governments of all hues in our country practise towards its toiling people. This is not the first time a ban has been imposed. In 1992, after a spate of heavy repression under Congress chief minister Janardhan Reddy, it was imposed on the PWG and eight of its "front" organisations. And earlier, in the eighties, though no formal ban had been imposed, conditions of terror and liquidation faced the PWG and its mass representatives. But the government could not achieve its anti-people objective. The overt relaxation under Congress's Chenna Reddy in 1990, and the removal in 1995 of the ban of 1992 under TDP supremo N.T. Rama Rao was part of the effort of ruling class parties not to drastically lose support base in the electoral game. Nevertheless such proclaimed easing was basically designed by the State for counter-revolutionary and suppressive ends: primarily to encourage desertions and dissensions among revolutionary ranks feeling the crunch of the repressions and secondarily to watch and mark the movement and structures of the communist revolutionaries' organisation, for a more systematic repression to follow.

Ban or no ban, then, the repressive conditions persist; but what the ban signifies is an explicit stepping up of repression. An example of the barbaric lengths to which the rulers go is the murder in June of Comrade Ramakant, founder-member of the mine-workers' union Sikasa, and one other comrade, who were burnt to death.

While the State has made the PWG the focus of its formal bans and propaganda blitzkrieg, it is not only the PWG that is being, or will be, targetted by the State machinery. The August 1996 issue of *Red Star* points to a series of brutal murders of communist revolutionaries in the fortnight of June *before* the latest ban. Comrades Satyanarayana, Bhupala Reddy, Veera Reddy and three other comrades,

CPI(ML)-Red Flag reports, were killed in face encounters in Warangal district. Comrade C. Krishnamurthy, provincial committee member of CPI(ML)-Towards a New Democracy was killed in an encounter on the following day. In Kakinada, a district committee member of CPI(ML)-TND, was kidnapped and tortured for days before being remanded to judicial custody. A district committee member of CPI(ML)-Liberation was also arrested and criminally assaulted. In this period, too, raids were routinely conducted on villages; large numbers of "suspects" were arrested, tortured and confined; and attacks on women and oppressed sections continued unabated.

In fact, tortures and encounter deaths have been inflicted on comrades of various organisations in A.P. throughout the past decade. In the nineties these attacks have become more gruesome and brazen. The ban of 1992 was subsequently used to fiercely suppress any press coverage of any Naxalite activity and mass programmes. The cruel killing with torture then of two young pressmen (Ghulam Rasool and his friend) to drive home the point will have taught lesser press professionals the lesson for their professional life-time. The eight banned "front organisations" of the PWG covered all walks of secular life — peasants, workers, women, students, intellectuals and artists. This was a way, then, of terrorising all secular mass organisations in the state: by the state home minister's statement at the time, it was the only way to "effectively curb the open mass activity" of such groups. Raids on supporters' homes, torture and confinement, threat of confiscation of all properties of aiders and abettors arbitrarily so defined, were all aimed to crush the democratic activity and urges of common working people. The ban imposed now is in fact an attack on the struggle urge and desire for a revolutionary alternative among ordinary people.

The alternating use of stiff repression and calculated relaxation (with implicit invitation to desert) in fact exposes the political weakness of the ruling classes in handling the situation. Neither alternative yields results for the future security of the ruling classes. Revolutionary organisations, as the comprador press has been quick to point out this time, can go deeper underground. They and their representatives and sympathisers have frugal needs, know the people and their land and are given shelter by them. One ruling class press report from Gadchiroli indignantly points to the Rs 13.5 crore annual expenditure on a 3,000 strong police force to check just 84 squad members. The comprador press underlined the need for reform to reverse the revolutionary menace to the system. Of course, as the collapse of the "Rs 2/kg rice to the people" scheme and the prohibition on alcohol in Chandrababu Naidu's A.P. has underscored, the crisis in the political economic

system leaves the rulers no elbow room for even such show of reform. The rulers must, therefore, view the people and their revolutionary leadership with fear and fierce aggression. It is this basic approach, and the political weakness of the rulers implicit in it, that we must grasp in organising a fitting political response to it.

Statement

The Communist Party Reorganisation Centre of India (Marxist-Leninist) condemns the ban on the CPI(ML) People's War Group in Andhra Pradesh. It condemns the continued barbarous attacks on PWG and other communist revolutionary organisations, which it sees as part of the enhanced overall attack on democratic sections themselves. The encirclement and brutal treatment of whole villages and of urban localities is part of the State machinery's terror tactics to suppress the masses of our working people, to make them desist from any activity for realising a revolutionary change in their lives, and to make them disown their own fighting representations. Even the dubious "relaxation" of repressive onslaughts from time to time is aimed to lull the people, cause confusion and divisions in their fighting ranks, and entice some sections to desert the revolutionary stream and enter the electoral vortex. The alternating use of suppression and its relaxation shows the basic ineffectiveness of either method and the political debility of the rulers to tackle the situation. All the revolutionary organisations should strive to give a fitting political response to the State's actions taking into account this political debility of the rulers. They should hold high the flag of revolution steadfastly; step up their efforts to build the mass revolutionary movement and organised power of the people; and, on that basis, enable the struggling masses of people effectively to defend themselves and the gains of their class struggles against the State's suppressive measures and terror tactics. All the democratic and enlightened sections should unequivocally oppose this ban and the attendant persecution of the struggling people as well as the revolutionary and the democratic cadre.

Secretary,
Central Committee,
CPRCI(ML).

Our Legacy

In this issue we continue our series of articles on the legacy of the international communist movement.

The story of how the peoples of the Soviet Union resisted the Nazi invasion in 1941 is a remarkable epic. In valour and passion it rivals the great mythical epics, but in scale it dwarfs them: for its heroes and heroines were not individual noblemen, but literally millions of ordinary people. And they were not fighting for their individual honour or for that of their families, but in defence of what they had collectively built, a socialist State, their own political power. That was the secret to how the Soviet Union led the world struggle against fascism.

The article below provides some glimpses into how that fight was organised by the Communists.

War of the Whole People

It was the socialist Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership that played the leading role in saving the world from Hitlerite fascism. To appreciate this fact we need recall only a few facts.

Bulk of Hitler's forces ranged against the USSR

Hitler overran nearly all of Europe between 1939 and June 1941. In the latter half of the 1930s Germany and Italy had lent their armed support to Franco's victorious forces in Spain; Italy had invaded and captured Abyssinia; Japan had captured Manchuria and was attempting to subjugate all of China; and Germany had swallowed Austria. Now the Germans took just two years to conquer Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, France, the Balkans, and Greece. The Americans had yet not entered the war, and despite having declared war on Germany in September 1939, the British actually were avoiding

engaging the Germany forces. This was the period known as the "phony war". Even in 1942, Britain and the USA restricted themselves to small military operations in secondary theatres of war in Africa and the Pacific.

The contrast is striking in numbers. The Germans allocated 153 divisions, including 33 panzer (tank) and motorized divisions, to the invasion of the USSR. It was the mightiest invasion force in human history. By the summer of 1942, taking advantage of the failure of the British and Americans to open a second front, the Germans were able to raise the forces they devoted to fighting the Red Army to 237 divisions, and by the winter of 1942, to 266, of which 193 were German and the remaining their allies.

By contrast, there was no ground war in Europe at the time, and in North Africa the British were facing only four German and 11 Italian divisions. The British and the U.S. were evidently keeping open certain options. Senator Harry Truman (later to become Vice President of the USA, and then President) said the day after the Nazi invasion of the USSR: "If the Germans are winning we should help the Russians, and if the Russians are winning we should help the Germans, and that way let them kill as many as possible" (quoted in Anna Louise Strong, *The Stalin Era*).

Even after the turning point of the war in November 1942-February 1943 with the defeat of the Nazis at Stalingrad, and the steady stream of Soviet victories thereafter, the British and the Americans cooled their heels. They placed high hopes in an (unsuccessful) plot among the top echelons of the German army and police to assassinate Hitler, seize power, and conclude a separate peace with the Anglo-American forces.

By the beginning of 1944, of the 315 divisions and 10 brigades that made up the German army, a total of 198 divisions and six brigades, or 70 per cent of the forces, were operating on the Soviet-German front. A further 38 divisions and 18 brigades supplied by Germany's satellites were also on Soviet territory. In Italy the U.S. and the British troops were opposed by 19 divisions, or less than six per cent of Germany's ground forces. In France, Holland, Belgium and Norway, despite the expected Allied invasion from the British isles, the German command stationed only 64 divisions, or 20 per cent of its ground forces. (A joke was told in the besieged Leningrad of 1943: "Question: Why are you fighting? Hitler: 'For living space.' Stalin: 'Because we were attacked.' Churchill: 'Who told you we are fighting?'") The imperialist press recently made a lot of noise about the 50th anniversary of "D-Day", the June 6, 1944, landing of British and American forces at Normandy, France, which finally opened the

second front in Europe. This, they claim, was the assault that defeated Hitler. The absurdity of this claim can be seen from the fact that, at the time of D-Day, 259 German-led divisions were fighting the Red Army on the Eastern Front; of these only 60 divisions were shifted to the Western Front (most of 60 divisions were composed of over-age/under-age soldiers and forcibly conscripted East Europeans, while the cream of the Nazi forces remained ranged against the Red Army.)

Brunt of sacrifice of World War II borne by heroic Soviet people

The Soviet Union bore the brunt of Nazi savagery as did no other nation. It is estimated that 20 million Soviet people were either killed by the Nazis or died as a direct result of the war. This in a country of 200 million people. Twenty-five million people were rendered homeless, over 1,700 towns and 27,000 villages were largely or wholly destroyed, some 38,500 miles of railway were torn up, 90 per cent of the Donbas mines were wrecked and flooded, seven million horses, 17 million head of cattle, and 20 million pigs had been slaughtered or taken.

By contrast, by the end of the war, the British total dead and missing (presumed dead) of the armed forces amounted to 303,000; an additional 60,500 civilians died in air raids on the U.K., and 30,000 merchant Navy and fishermen. Britain's population at the time was about 48 million. The U.S. suffered deaths only in the armed forces -- a total of 322,000 (Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. III).

Initial military superiority of the Nazis

At the start of the war with the USSR, the German superiority in men and equipment was great. The Nazi invasion force consisted of 5.5 million officers and men; the Soviet troops on this front were 170 divisions with a total of 2.9 million men. The Nazis on this front had superiorities of roughly 2:1 in tanks, 3:1 in combat aircraft, and 1.5:1 in guns and mortars.

More to the point was the situation along the main line of the Germans' advance, where the ratios favoured them by 3:1 or even 5:1.

Blitzkrieg strategy -- strengths and weaknesses

The military strategy of the Nazis was shaped by the nature of the fascist regime. The regime had prevented the development of discontent at home precisely by avoiding any major sacrifices for the German people as a result of foreign military adventures. There was no rationing; no conversion of consumer goods industries to military purposes; no recruitment of women workers to replace the manpower sent off to

war; limited loss of life despite large-scale battles (the Nazis had conquered almost the whole of Europe losing only 300,000 men). Yet detailed intelligence reports of domestic opinion showed that Germans were indeed not enthusiastic about the war -- their mood varied between "brief periods of exultation when victories were announced and relapses into depression when they were not followed by a return to peace." In March 1942 Hitler said that, if one judged the state of the country from the complaints included in these intelligence reports, the war would have been long lost. (*Germany 1866-1945*)

The Nazi strategy in battle was thus calculated to ensure speedy victories with minimum loss of German life and maximum economic gain. This was the infamous "blitzkrieg" -- lightning war -- whereby swiftly moving mechanized columns (tanks and armoured vehicles) would shatter the enemy's defences at key points; in close coordination with these forces, the German air force would pound the enemy troops into disarray. Infantry assault teams would only then follow, to engage with the left-overs; and the "soft" civilian rear would be rapidly seized, to deprive the front of hinterland support. The intention of this strategy was to prevent the scale of German loss of life and loss of morale which would be inevitable in extended conflicts. It also allowed the Germans to seize, virtually intact, the productive forces of the conquered country, and exploit them in favour of Germany.

But the seeming strength of the blitzkrieg was also its weakness. If the assault did not succeed rapidly, serious deficiencies in supply would turn up; there would be frequent mechanized failures because of the shortage of spare parts; long infantry entanglements would lead to heavy loss of life; the domestic front, fed on promises of quick victory and rich spoils without sacrifices, would grow restive as the war brought no clear victory and no spoils; the morale of the troops themselves would flag.

Seeming invincibility of the blitzkrieg

At any rate, none of these eventualities occurred as the Nazis swept through Europe. They reoccupied the Rhineland in 1936, occupied Austria in 1938, and occupied Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939, without even having to fight: they merely terrorised these states into submission. The invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, ended in just three weeks. On April 9, 1940, Germany conquered Denmark in a day and Norway in 48 hours. The invasion of Holland on May 9-10 compelled the Dutch to surrender in five days. On May 27 the Belgians surrendered. On June 17 the French capitulated. Between April and May 1940 the Nazis conquered the Balkans and Greece. Besides, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary were made satellite states.

"Operation Barbarossa", the Nazi plan for the invasion of the USSR, did not envision the occupation of all of the USSR immediately. Its objective was the occupation of the developed western half, including Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad; the aim was to reach a line between Archangelsk in the north and the mouth of the Volga river in the south, leaving the USSR no other industrial region than the Urals. The rich farmlands of the western and southern USSR, the coal mines and petroleum of the south, the industries of Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev, Smolensk, Stalingrad, Kharkov, and other cities, as well as the large manpower that could be shipped to Germany as slaves -- all these were to be acquired before the winter of 1941 set in.

The USSR's chances were not rated highly by the outside world. Hitler declared: "When this Russian army is once hit, disaster will be uncontrollable." He ordered the armed forces to prepare "even before the conclusion of the war against England, to crush Soviet Russia in a rapid campaign". The Chief of Staff of the German ground forces, General Franz Halder, declared that Soviet Russia was just like a pane of glass: if you struck it once with your fist, it would shatter immediately. U.S. Secretary of War Stimson reported on June 23, a day after the Nazi invasion began, that U.S. Army leaders believed that Germany would defeat the USSR in less than three months.

Indeed, in the first days of the war there would seem on the surface to be little reason to dispute this assessment. In the north, the Nazi army drove from Finland and against the Arctic port Murmansk; in the centre, from Poland and towards Moscow; in the south, from Romania towards Kiev and Odessa. By July 10 they had advanced 500 km from the border along the northwestern line of advance, 600 km along the western line and 350 km along the southwestern line. Soon they had captured the whole of Byelorussia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldavia and many parts of the Ukraine, and were at the gates of Leningrad. At the start of July the Germans had completed their plans for their victory parade in Leningrad, where the happy Fuhrer would review his victorious troops. Guidebooks to the sights of Leningrad were printed and distributed to the troops.

The answer to the Nazi military strategy

The Soviet Union's resistance hinged on being able to take advantage of its own strengths and of the enemy's weaknesses in order to fight in its own way, in the manner of its choosing. The advantages of the Soviet Union were as follows: It was a socialist State, with a planned economy. It was led by a Communist Party steeled in struggle. And the Soviet people wholeheartedly supported, and placed their faith in, their own State.

Therefore the USSR was capable of gearing the entire economy to defence production rapidly. It was capable of mobilising the entire people to fight a dogged, protracted conflict. And it was capable of inspiring them to extraordinary heroism, individual and collective, in defence of their own State.

The Soviet Union's strategy of resistance was, as Stalin put it, a "*war of the whole people*". This involved the following:

1.) Inspiring the people and steeling their resolve in the fight. The Great Patriotic War once again put the Bolshevik party to the severest test, a test which it passed gloriously. The Central Committee passed a resolution for the Communists to go to the front and do political work there. "Political work" meant understanding the strategy being pursued, playing the leading role in the fighting, and inspiring the rest of the troops to do the same. By the end of 1941, 1.2 million Communists -- two-fifths of the Party membership -- were in the armed forces. They took the lead in the fighting: in the first year of the war, 400,000 were killed. In the frontline areas the percentage of participation was even higher: for example, at Leningrad, 70 per cent of the Party membership and 90 per cent of the Komsomol membership took part in the armed resistance. Many Party members were sent to infiltrate enemy lines and organise resistance in the occupied areas. In besieged and starvation-wracked cities they not only mobilised the people to build defences and train themselves in fighting, but took on all the most onerous duties, such as going house to house to aid the starving and ailing, as well as clear the bodies of the dead. Those not in the armed forces were carrying on battle in other fronts -- in order to mobilise the people to produce at hectic rates and reach much needed supplies on time. No one reading the narrative of the war can fail to be struck by how the resistance only succeeded because it was organised by an iron-strong Bolshevik party. Little wonder that Hitler instructed his troops to go to any lengths to wipe out the "commissars".

2.) Mobilisation of the country's economic resources to fight the enemy. This required a vast switchover of production to meet the defence needs: tractor factories turned out tanks, steel plants began producing metals needed for tanks and guns, agricultural machinery works began turning out mortars. Massive planning was required to plan new production links between the plants to ensure smooth production -- and this planning had to be done at top speed.

At the same time, the most remarkable evacuation in history took place. Whole giant factories were dismantled and shipped to the east of the USSR, where they were reassembled in a matter of weeks.

Anna Louise Strong notes: "The German war machine and the German people had fattened on the loot of Europe; they starved when Hitler entered Russia. Their troops came to the Dnieper and happily saw beyond the ruined dam the massive buildings of the great Dnieper industries, the first factories they had seen intact in the USSR.... But when they reached the buildings, every machine down to the last bolt and nut, had gone East." (*The Stalin Era*)

Crops had to be harvested quickly, before the enemy took the area, sometimes even under enemy fire. Cattle and other livestock had to be shifted along with the peasantry. By the spring of 1942 the eastern regions of the USSR were accommodating 7.4 million evacuees. In addition, 2.4 million head of cattle were transferred to these parts along with a large quantity of tractors and agricultural equipment.

3.) **Denial of the country's resources to the enemy.** Wherever the Nazis had marched in over the whole of Europe, the entire productive forces of the bourgeois regimes fell into their laps virtually intact. It was on the basis of this enhanced economic power that Germany was now assaulting the USSR. Hence, Stalin declared in his first speech after the invasion, in case of a forced retreat, "not a single locomotive or railway car, not a single pound of grain or gallon of fuel should be left for the enemy." And so the Soviet people, who had put in such labour of love into socialist construction, were equally prepared to destroy their work rather than let it be used as a weapon against them. Thus the great Dnieper Dam was blown up, flooding the region. Crops that could not be moved were burnt.

4.) **Creation of large reserves.** Not only were reserve army men mobilised, but also huge numbers of Soviet people volunteered during the first few days of the war itself. By July 1, 1941, 5.3 million people had enlisted either through mobilisation or volunteering. Even more ordinary citizens between 16 and 50 took military training without taking time off from work. Special Komsomol (Communist youth organisation) and young people's units were trained to destroy tanks, operate machine guns and mortars, and master other military skills. By September 1941, over seven million people were involved in military training. The gigantic task of ensuring that the fresh reserves were trained and equipped paid off in time as the fresh Soviet forces began turning the tables on the Nazi army from 1942 onwards.

5.) **Partisan warfare in the occupied territories so as to deny any "rear" to the Nazis.** By far the most impressive anti-Nazi resistance in the occupied territories during the Second World War was that in

the occupied areas of the Soviet Union. The Party and the Government issued a directive on June 29 1941 itself regarding organising such resistance, and by the end of 1941 on occupied Soviet territory there were already more than 250 underground regional, town and district Party committees directing the military operations of hundreds of partisan detachments.

The aim of organising partisan detachments and sabotage groups in these regions was to create intolerable conditions for the enemy and tie up his troops in defending already conquered areas. By December 1942 the German rear was being harassed by 1,013 partisan detachments comprising some 100,000 fighters, operating under the direction of underground party committees.

Youth were especially active in the partisan guerrilla organisations. Their work was full of danger and required great heroism. A typical example was the struggle of the underground youth organisation, the Young Guards, in Krasnodon of the Donets Basin. The membership of this organisation was about 200. It distributed anti-fascist leaflets, carried out sabotage, and frustrated the occupation forces' activities. With the help of traitors, the Gestapo managed to capture nearly all the Young Guards, who were then cruelly tortured to death.

By March 1943, the German command was obliged to assign 19 divisions and 300 separate units and SS detachments to protecting the army's lines of communication from the partisan fighters. In the summer of 1943 the occupation forces had to raise the number of divisions protecting the rear to 25. In August 1943, at the height of the battle of Kursk, the partisans developed their "rail war". The first stage of the operation alone involved 170 partisan detachments consisting of some 100,000 men. In just a single night, August 3, they put some 42,000 rails out of action, and 200,000 in all by mid-September.

6) **Tying down the enemy by fighting a dogged resistance even in retreat.** The switchover of production to military needs, the re-starting of relocated production units, the raising, training and equipping of military reserves, the development of partisan resistance -- all would take time.

On the other hand, the enemy was in a hurry: the Germans' schedule was to complete Operation Barbarossa by September-end, or at any rate before winter set in. In particular, at the outset they set themselves the important targets of Moscow, Leningrad, and the southern regions rich with coal and oil. Every day that the enemy was delayed in the accomplishment of these objectives was precious: for it would skew the entire logistics of the operation, and would allow the Soviet reserves to be prepared and brought into action. Thus the vital sig-

nificance for the Soviets of defending in the fiercest possible way even those positions that could not be held for long, fighting "lost battles" as if there were hope of winning.

It is interesting to compare the resistance put up by European cities and Soviet cities. Virtually all of the major European cities meekly surrendered as Nazi troops marched in. There were no battles in the streets; no popular barricades; no protracted sieges.

By contrast, the battle for Kiev, capital of the Soviet Ukraine, lasted 83 days, with the working class of the city fighting alongside the troops. No doubt the Nazis, numerically and technically superior, won, but not before losing 100,000 troops. For 69 days the coastal army and the Black Sea fleet defended Odessa, assisted by the local population, before the city was finally abandoned. The coastal city of Sevastopol fought for 250 days of heroic defence, cut off from all overland communication with the rear, and facing great hardship in procuring food and ammunition. Only on July 4, 1942, was the Sevastopol defence abandoned. The historic city of Leningrad, cradle of the Revolution, faced the longest and most painful siege in human history -- the 900 days' siege, as it came to be known. For the first winter of the siege there were virtually no supplies of food: rations in December were just *125 grammes of bread* a day per head. Starvation took the lives of over 700,000 in this city of 2.5 million. Yet they refused to surrender! The Leningraders held out till, due to losses on other fronts, the Germans were forced to retreat. In each of these cities, apart from tens of thousands of citizens volunteering to fight alongside the troops (no matter that they had inadequate weapons and even less training), virtually all able-bodied persons were mobilised to dig trenches, build barricades and fortifications, patrol the roofs so as to throw incendiary bombs off when the Germans dropped them, form workers' battalions that would engage the invading troops, and so on.

Battle of Moscow: First setback for the Nazis

Smolensk fell; Kiev, too, fell; but it was crucial that Moscow not fall. Stalin stayed in Moscow even through the period of greatest danger, and personally directed the front as Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet armed forces.

By September 30, 1941, anxious at the slipping deadlines for the completion of Operation Barbarossa, the German command decided to focus its efforts in the direction of Moscow. Two-thirds of its panzer and motorised divisions on the entire front were concentrated here, and the Germans had, on the central direction of attack, 40 per cent more men, 120 per cent more tanks, 90 per cent more guns and

mortars, and 160 per cent more aircraft. More armoured divisions were pitched against Moscow than had been used in the entire invasion of France in 1940. "The way has been prepared", said Hitler, "for the final, shattering blow which will crush the enemy before winter sets in". Two strike forces moved to the north and south to cut off the city in a pincer movement while the third struck in the direction of the city itself. The Nazis advanced towards the capital steadily, but there was bitter fighting each step of the way.

On October 20 a state of siege was declared in Moscow and its suburbs. The Moscow Party organisation rallied magnificently, and 360,000 Communist Party members and Komsomol members went off to the front. Muscovites worked day and night to turn their city into a virtual fortress, building defence lines. In case the enemy should break into the city, the citizens formed hundreds of armed workers' detachments, combat units and tank destroyer units. About 100,000 Muscovites took military training without leaving their regular jobs. During the Battle of Moscow many joined regular forces at the front. Meanwhile, workers in the armaments plants put in 16 to 18 hours a day in order to turn out equipment at breakneck speed.

In defence of Moscow, new troop formations were being raised in Caucasus, in the Volga area and the Urals. Vast reserves of men, fuel, military equipment, weapons and food were being rushed to defend the capital. But time was running out. By the beginning of November 1941 the fascist troops stood at the approaches to the capital.

The enemy had to be delayed, if not defeated; for indeed, if he were delayed, he could be defeated. For that, given the concentration on Moscow, the Soviets would need to display *superhuman valour* against numerically and technically superior forces.

Indeed, that was what they did. The people will not forget the heroes and heroines of that struggle. An anti-tank group of just 28 men -- Russians, Ukrainians, Kazakhs, and Kirghizes -- when attacked by 50 tanks and enemy submachinegunners along the Volokolamsk Highway, near Dubosekovo, refused to retreat, and miraculously halted the Nazis for four hours, crippling 18 tanks. They were led by their political instructor V.G. Klochkov, a young man, who told his comrades that there was nowhere to retreat -- Moscow was behind them. He died along with 21 others of the 28; of the remaining, four were gravely wounded.

Nor will the people forget Moscow Komsomol schoolgirl Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, sent as part of a partisan group behind enemy lines, caught, tortured, and hanged without betraying even her identity to the enemy. As she was about to be hanged she shouted to the collective farmers herded there by the German troops: "Hey comrades,

why d'you look so glum? Show more courage, fight, kill the Germans, burn them, hunt them down like rats! I'm not afraid of death, comrades. It's happiness to die for your people..." Then, addressing the German soldiers: "You're about to hang me, but I'm not alone. There are two hundred million of us, you can't hang us all. My death will be avenged..." Then, at last, "Goodbye, comrades! Fight, don't be afraid..."

And they will remember the raw 17- and 18-year-old cadets of the two Podolsk military schools, who were given the task on October 6, 1941 of holding up the Nazi battering-ram for five to seven days against all odds. They managed, in fact, to stall the enemy till October 18, at the cost of most of their own lives. General Strelbitsky, then commander of the Podolsk artillery school, movingly described in his article "Twelve Days of One Year" how the cadets fought on in many instances even when thoroughly outnumbered, in the face of certain death. "Almost every one who returned to the school applied to join the Party", said Strelbitsky.

There were many, many others, whose names might not have been recorded, but whose valour was no less. Strelbitsky records an instance: "At dawn on October 6 our cadets reached the western outskirts of the vill Strelkalovo where they found some Soviet Soldiers who were exchanging lively fire with the Germans. I hesitate even to call them 'soldiers' since they were sixteen- and seventeen-year-old boys armed with German submachine guns and machine guns. Captain Ivan Starchak, chief of the paratrooper service of the Western Front was in command. Later they told us their story. They were Komsozol (Communist youth) activists from the regions which were occupied by the Germans, and were training at a special reconnaissance school. They were going to operate deep in enemy territory. Starchak was their parachute instructor. When they heard of the German breakthrough, Starchak realised that the road to Moscow was wide open. He assumed command over the group and straddled the road. For 24 hours they kept the Germans at bay. Twenty-four hours meant a lot in those days. Hundreds of young Komsomol boys gave their lives on that small stretch of road from Yukhnov to the river Ugra. Each captured submachine gun and machine gun had meant the spitting of their blood. But they had held out!"

What we learn, in fact, from the history of the Great Patriotic War is the capacity socialism had to inspire vast masses of ordinary people to extraordinary heroism in its defence. Such heroism was not out of some blind patriotism inherent in the Russian psyche, as some would suggest. (See, by contrast, the poor showing of the Tsarist troops in World War I.) Rather, it flowed from their identification with the socialist state, their own rule.

Stalin realised very well the political and military significance of this heroism. Even as the Nazis stood a bare 40 km from the city, the Party decided to hold the traditional meeting of the Moscow Soviet on November 6, and the military parade on November 7, the 24th anniversary of the Revolution, with Stalin addressing the gathering from Lenin's tomb. Troops marched past in the defiant parade -- and then straight on to the front.

The Germans threw yet more forces into the fight during their second offensive, which began on November 18. By mid-November, along the main line of attack, they had a 5:2 superiority in tanks and 1.7:1 in artillery. And yet the defenders held every inch with their lives, making the enemy pay the price. In the twenty days of their second offensive (November 18-December 1) the Nazis lost over 155,000 dead and wounded, about 800 tanks, over 300 guns and some 1,500 aircraft.

Finally, on December 6, 1941, the Soviet counter-offensive was launched, with the help of reinforcements that had been built up in the interim. The interesting feature of the counter-offensive was that the enemy still had a numerical superiority in tanks and artillery. But the enemy was now battered and demoralised. He had tasted here, over the course of six months on Soviet battlefields, what he had not tasted while overrunning all of Europe: "*war of the whole people*". The Nazis retreated, for the first time. The exhilarated people of the world called it the "miracle at Moscow". By January 1942 the Red Army mounted a general counter-offensive, pushing the Nazis back further.

The Battle of Moscow had been the decisive engagement of the first year of the war. It had shown that, given death-defying display of grit by the masses, the Germans could be tied down and delayed; and if they could be delayed, they could be defeated by reinforcements. This was a lesson that was to be put to use again in July-November 1942.

As yet the matter was far from decided. By the spring of 1942 the Red Army counter-offensive had ground to a halt. The Germans managed to dig in 120 km from Moscow, and so continued to pose a threat to the capital. They took the coastal town of Sevastopol in July 1942. The siege of Leningrad continued.

Now the Germans decided to launch a fresh offensive, but this time in the south, where the country's petroleum reserves lay. It was the battle there, at the city of Stalingrad on the west bank of the Volga river, that justly has been considered the single most important battle in human history. For it marked the turning point of World War II itself. The story of how Stalingrad resisted, and finally dug Hitler's grave, would require a separate article.

How Socialist China Defeated Inflation

The last five years, during the IMF-ordered 'structural adjustment' programme, have witnessed sharp inflation -- the highest average rate for any five-year period since the transfer of power. Indeed, the feature of the structural adjustment programme that most directly affects the largest number of people is sustained price rise, thrusting crores of people into even more dire poverty. People treat with disdain the recent statistical exercises whereby the Government has attempted to prove that, in fact, prices have come under control. But while the common people feel robbed and cheated by price rise, they have little insight into its causes, and even less hope that it can ever be brought under control, let alone reversed.

When there is general price rise, the owners of land and capital are able to compensate for this by raising rents, interest rates, and prices of their commodities. However, workers are unable to fully compensate by hiking the price of their labour power. And hence inflation actually signifies the intensified exploitation of the toiling sections.

Causes of price rise in India

In semi-feudal semi-colonial India, there are five or six major sources of price rise.

First, given the *backwardness of production*, there are frequently shortages of various commodities. For example, there are perpetually shortages of such essential commodities as pulses and edible oils. Taking advantage of these shortages, there is large-scale hoarding and blackmarketing in scarce commodities. Gigantic stocks of black money are easily and swiftly deployed toward such hoarding.

Secondly, the State incurs substantial *budgetary deficits* -- that is, in order to make up the shortfall in its revenue, the State creates additional money. Since additional money is put in circulation without additional commodities to back it up, the price of each commodity rises. Thus deficit-induced price rise is effectively a tax, one which hits the poor the hardest. (In connection with the question of deficits three points need to be noted. [i] The shortfall in revenues in the

budget arises partly from the refusal to tax the rich or to attack black money. [ii] The growth in expenditure is partly due to ballooning servicing costs of foreign and internal debt, as well as various other unproductive expenditures and transfers of wealth to the rich. [iii] Budgetary deficits, while inflationary in the short term, need not be so in the long term if deficits are incurred for *productive* purposes -- ie if in the long term supply of commodities increases. However, since in fact they are incurred for largely *unproductive* purposes, they fuel inflation. Given the huge and growing requirements of servicing the domestic and foreign debt, there is little scope for the budget deficit to ever come under control in the present set-up.)

Thirdly, the Indian economy is *dependent on imports*, the way that Third world countries are. Consequently there are various forms of drain by foreign interests (foreign debt servicing payments, profits on foreign investment, illegal flight of capital). The consequent constant shortage of foreign exchange leads to the continuous devaluation of the Indian rupee vis-a-vis the currencies of developed countries. As a result, imports cost more in rupee terms, leading to general price rise. (At times, price rise also results from increases in international prices of imported commodities -- eg. oil; on the other hand, decreases in international prices of certain commodities produced by India also leads to these commodities being exported, regardless of Indian needs -- eg. export of cotton yarn -- and this in turn leads to hikes in domestic prices of such products.)

Fourthly, on the basis of their stranglehold over the Indian economy and polity, *imperialist interests are able to hike prices here*. For example, they are able to sell goods (eg. machinery) to India at prices far higher than they are able to in their own countries.

Finally, under World Bank-IMF guidance (which indeed has been there, steadily increasing, since 1957, but has dramatically increased since 1991), all public expenditure is being tailored more and more to the interests of foreign capital. This means that expenditures that do not directly benefit foreign capital's present interests are curtailed -- eg. food and fertiliser subsidy, leading to sharp increases in food and fertiliser prices (and thereby all prices in the economy). Indeed even non-subsidised services, such as the railways, are being whipped into generating profits by hiking their prices. Further, in an attempt to attract foreign capital to various infrastructural sectors, the prices of the services/commodities produced by these sectors are being increased rapidly.

In essence all these causes of price rise are related to the semi-feudal, semi-colonial nature of our country's economy: an economy where production remains relatively backward; where, as a result of the

narrowness of the market (ie the poverty of the masses), capital flows into parasitic activities such as speculation/hoarding rather than productive activities; where the State itself operates as an instrument for gigantic parasitic extractions by rentier classes; where the economy is not insulated from, but is bound to, the world economy, and where imperialist interests are able, by and large, to dictate the oppressive and extortionist terms of that integration into the world economy. In sum, prices reflect the heightened extractions by domestic and foreign parasites.

The socialist way

By contrast, let us look at how socialist China (1949-76) dealt with the question of prices: first, how they kept prices under control; and secondly, how they subordinated prices to the interests of the toiling classes.

Before liberation, the Chinese people suffered the horrors of inflation perhaps more than any other country in the world. From 1937, when the war against Japanese aggression began, to May 1949, the Kuomintang government multiplied the total amount of bank-notes 140 billion times. At the end of the period, goods procurable in 1937 with one yuan (the Chinese currency) cost some 8,500,000,000,000 in 1949. In 1937, 100 yuan could buy two cows; by 1941, they could buy a sack of flour; by 1945, two eggs; by 1949, a single sheet of toilet paper. Between drawing their salaries at their workplace and making their purchases the same day, workers would find prices had shot up by 20 per cent.

With the founding of the People's Republic, control of prices and establishment of the new currency were urgent tasks of the Communists. The first move was to smash speculation, banning trafficking in gold and silver coins and foreign currencies, making the new currency (the *renminbi*) the only medium of exchange, and arresting hundreds of leading speculators in precious metals, grain and other commodities. The State commercial departments seized control of large stocks of commodities such as grain, cotton yarn and piece goods, coal, salt, supplies for industry, etc, and ensured normal supplies to the market.

Under the Kuomintang (KMT) comprador-feudal regime, the Chinese currency's value had been in the grip of imperialist powers. In 1935, the KMT regime instituted a new currency, the "*fabi*", which was pegged to the value of the British pound, and later the U.S. dollar. The country's entire gold and silver reserves were deposited in banks in London and New York. The currency's value reflected the fluctuations in the value of the dollar and the pound; moreover, it reflected the relative strength of the Chinese economy vis-a-vis those imperialist

economies. Thus, when the dollar or pound caught a cold, the *fabi* caught pneumonia. In 1935-37, when the price index went up 22 per cent in Britain, in China it went up 34 per cent.

The People's Republic in 1949 centralised all foreign trade transactions in the hands of the State. Secondly, it established its own foreign exchange rates, and outlawed all private foreign trade as well as private dealing in foreign exchange. In just five months, between November 1949 and March 1950, the People's Republic established a unified fiscal and economic administration, eliminating waste in governmental expenditure, enforcing rigid control of cash.

Thereafter, China pursued a series of policies which ensured the stability of the currency.

1.) The key factor was ensuring a large volume of goods in the hands of the State. Agricultural growth was 2.5 to 3 per cent a year, a modest rate compared to the rate of industrial growth, but achieved under adverse conditions. By 1977, China grew 30 to 40 per cent more food per capita on 14 per cent less land than India. This was made possible by land reform, followed by step by step cooperation, the development of communes, the introduction of new technologies, the extension of irrigation, electrification, mechanization, and land reconstruction. Equally importantly, China distributed this food far more equitably to a population 50 per cent larger than India's. This was made possible by state purchase of crops and distribution through state commercial enterprises.

In industry, the growth was most dramatic: taking 1957=100, the index of industrial production grew from 61 in 1953 to 523 in 1976. According to the statistics of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. Department of Commerce, China's crude oil production grew from 0.4 million tonnes (mt) in 1952 to 84 mt by 1976; coal from 66.5 mt to 448 mt; cement from 2.9 mt to 49.3 mt; chemical fertiliser from 0.2 mt to 27.9 mt (by 1975); electric power from 7.3 billion kwh to 133 billion kwh; tractors from zero to 190,000 15 hp units; powered irrigation equipment from zero to 7,000 thousand-hp units (by 1975). (p. 136, *The People's Republic of China: A Documentary History of Revolutionary Change*, ed. by Mark Selden, 1979)

However, following Mao's principle of "walking on two legs", heavy industry was not built up at the expense of consumer goods industries. Through socialist construction, the supply of all sorts of consumer goods such as cloth, paper, sugar, cigarettes, medicines, bicycles, sewing machines, radios, and so on increased several-fold. The volume of the nation's retail sales in 1973 was more than seven times that of the early post-liberation days. Stocks on hand at the end of June

1974 were double those of the same month in 1965. The plentitude of commodities behind the increase in money supply served to stabilise prices.

2.) The circulation of money was planned so as to prevent imbalances between the supply of money and of commodities. Moreover, strict controls were placed on cash. All government agencies, organisations, factories and enterprises were required to deposit their cash in the bank, leaving only a stipulated amount in hand, thus preventing any hoarding/speculation by these bodies. The People's Bank of China, the sole source of loans, provided short-term credit to enterprises and communes according to the growth of production and the expansion of the market. (Long-term capital needs of enterprises were met, not by loans, but by direct State allocations.)

3.) Unified price management was also possible because the State owned all the products made by the State enterprises, and purchased all marketable farm produce from rural people's communes at (reasonable) prices it set. For commodities vital to the national interest and to the livelihood of the people, such as steel, coal, petroleum, grain, cotton piecegoods, etc, the central government set prices at every stage -- procurement, transfer, and retail sale. Other products' prices would be locally fixed according to the rules issued by the central government; in the case of perishable goods such as vegetables and fruit, there would be greater flexibility to decide these at the county level or even the shop level, keeping in mind general principles of price administration.

In a capitalist economy, when supply of a particular commodity falls short of demand, its price goes up, thus reducing demand. But in socialist China, in such cases, if the commodity was an essential one, rationing would be instituted and efforts would be made to step up supply as soon as possible.

In the case of non-essential commodities, however, prices were sometimes raised. But these price rises would be accompanied by reduction in the prices of some other goods thus ensuring that the total purchasing power in the hands of the people remained the same, and hence the value of the currency remained stable.

It is important to remember that price-setting by the State was only possible because of other measures, namely, (a) the ample supply of goods was ensured, and (b) a tight leash was maintained on holding of cash, expansion of credit, and addition to the money supply. In the absence of these measures, subterranean blackmarketing would have taken place.

4.) During 1937-47, deficit financing averaged 70 per cent or more of the total budget of the KMT regime. As the compradors and feudal forces were expropriated after liberation, and large industry was nationalised, the State possessed adequate revenues to ensure that it did not need to engage in deficit financing. The revenue from state enterprises grew from 34 per cent of the budget in the early years after liberation to 90 per cent by the mid 1970s. In order to balance the budget, the stress was on increasing revenue rather than increasing the rate of taxes. Indeed, there were no personal income taxes (income differentials were relatively small, and by the 1970s related basically to number of years of service and to difference in skill levels). Agricultural tax fell from 12 per cent of total farm output in 1952 to 5 per cent in the 1970s, and represented only a very small part of state revenues.

In increasing revenue of state enterprises, prices of their products were not increased; rather, efforts were made to enhance productivity and exercise thrift.

In this fashion, by the beginning of 1965, China had *paid off all of such external debts as it acquired in the 1950s*, and by the end of 1968, it had *redeemed the last of its domestic debts*.

Not only did China thus turn a budgetary surplus in most years, but it was able to set aside about 2.6 per cent of the budgetary expenditure each year as a contingent fund. Moreover, the state maintained stocks of goods in its hands, which were in fact another form of fiscal reserve. These measures allowed for balancing the budget even in bad years.

5.) Since all of socialist China's foreign trade was centralised in the hands of the State, it could ensure that imports and exports were made on the basis of what was feasible and in the people's interests. Exports of commodities would not be undertaken irrespective of the Chinese people's needs for them. Heavy imports were not allowed; hence, international price fluctuations had no effect. At any rate, domestic prices were de-linked from international prices. Negative balance of trade was also not allowed. Thus, unlike during the KMT times, neither was there a drain of gold from the country nor did the Chinese currency's value come under pressure.

6.) The aid (in capital, technology, skilled manpower and training) received by China from the then socialist Soviet Union shortly after liberation in 1949 was on exemplary terms, extremely beneficial to China. But after the rise of Krushchev's revisionism, and China's opposition to it, aid was abruptly discontinued in 1960, leading to

massive dislocation in the industrial sphere. Thereafter China placed even greater emphasis on building up an indigenous technological base. Shortly China made such advances that it was at no one's mercy in the field of technology. Hence it was able to avoid the overpriced imports of capital goods and high technology payments which are the fate of so many Third World countries such as ours.

In brief, China liberated itself from semi-feudal, semi-colonial bondage.

7.) The principle governing prices, as with all other prices of the economy, was its subordination to the political objectives. It is first necessary, by contrast, to see what role prices play in bourgeois economics.

Ruling class political representatives and bourgeois economists fetishize and mystify prices. Prices, according to them, ought to be "flexible", as they reflect demand and supply conditions. If demand rises for some commodity, its price will rise, promising more profits for the producers. Producers in turn will increase production. Thus the price increase would operate as a "signal" to producers as to how much to produce of what commodity (which in turn, would dictate the process used). And if prices of a commodity fall, say bourgeois economists, this indicates lack of demand, in turn signalling profit-driven producers to shift production away from that commodity. In the bourgeois theory of economic efficiency, then, price plays a key role. Intervention by the State to fix prices, it is claimed, leads to "distortions" and inefficient allocation of resources.

But in fact price is not a neutral indicator. Under capitalism, price includes profit to the capitalist. The decision of the capitalist regarding what should be produced, and how much of it, is determined by profitability at a given price level, not by broader economic good. For example, if it is not *profitable* to provide everyone with enough food, decent housing, and clothing at prices they can afford, capitalism will not do so; and indeed it does not do so.

By contrast, prices in socialist China were subordinated to socialist objectives. This does not mean that prices were set without reference to costs. Indeed, prices were broadly set according to production costs, the expenses of administration in wholesaling and retailing, plus a tax and a "profit" per unit. However, the detailed picture was more complex.

First, for several commodities, such as basic daily necessities such as cotton cloth, grain, and edible oils, prices were set low, usually accompanied by rationing. The aim was a fair distribution of basic items to everyone. For non-necessities, prices were set relatively high,

yielding larger profits, most of which went to State and provincial budgets, thus effectively cross-subsidizing essentials.

Secondly, prices at which the State purchased agricultural produce from the peasantry were steadily increased, while prices of industrial goods sold in the countryside were kept the same or even lowered. (For example, prices of fertiliser, fuel, livestock feed, electricity and various types of equipment were actually lowered.) Taking the year 1950 = 100, the terms of trade index between China's agriculture and industry moved in agriculture's favour, to 134.4 by 1958, and 166.7 by 1970. (*China's Economy and the Maoist Strategy*, John Gurley, 1976, p. 251) This is directly contrary to the experiences of almost all Third World countries. At the same time, the State ensured that urban consumers did not suffer: grain was sold by the State in urban areas (and in those rural areas devoted mostly to industrial crops) at prices *below* the purchase price. This subsidy was incurred by the State (i) because it deemed that ensuring adequate food for all was an overriding objective of the State, and (ii) because ensuring reasonable prices for agricultural goods ensured that agriculture had the capacity to invest in improvements to increase output further.

Thirdly, prices were generally prevented from fluctuating. Stability of prices allowed for smooth execution of the plan (calculations and allocations would otherwise be disrupted by prices changing. And if prices, especially the major ones, could change at any time, enterprises might respond to them in ways that would either reduce the supplies needed by other enterprises or leave surplus goods to accumulate unused.) Moreover, price stability cemented the alliance between urban workers and rural peasants (price changes generally enhance the income of one section at the cost of another).

Finally, in a variety of ways, steps were taken to reduce the role of money and prices in the spheres of production and distribution. For example, a number of services were provided free to their members by communes and to the workers by industrial enterprises: health care, education, bathing and shaving facilities, entertainment, and so on. This further insulated the people from price changes.

What was the effect of all these policies? Prices in socialist China remained miraculously stable, and in fact even *fell* slightly. A hundred *yuan* in 1973 could buy commodities it would have cost 101.6 *yuan* to buy in 1965, according to the Statistical Bureau of the Peking Municipality. In the case of services, 100 *yuan* in 1973 could buy what it would have cost 103.2 *yuan* to buy in 1965. If, in 1965, in Peking, two *yuan* could buy 0.25 kg of pork, 0.25 kg of eggs, one kg of ribbon fish, 0.5 kg of bean curd and 0.5 kg of cabbage, in

1974 it could still buy all of that -- plus 0.5 kg each of potatoes and green onions. (*Why China Has No Inflation*, Feng Kuang-hsi, Peking, 1976)

As can be seen from the accompanying table, the cost of living of staff and workers remained the same between 1965 and 1975 (row 1), the retail price index fell (row 2), the price index for industrial products sold in rural areas fell (row 3), and the agricultural procurement price index rose (row 4).

China's Price Indices, 1952-75: stable prices, improvement in agriculture's terms of trade (1950 = 100)

	1952	1957	1965	1970	1975
Cost of living of staff and workers	115.5	126.6	119.0	137.8	139.5
Retail price index	111.8	121.3	104.6	131.5	131.9
Price index of industrial products sold in rural areas	109.7	112.7	108.4	111.9	109.6
Agricultural procurement price index	121.6	146.2	107.9	195.1	208.7

State Statistical Bureau, quoted in World Bank, China: Socialist Economic Development, vol. 1.

After the reversal in China, of course, price rise has been unleashed on the people. Capitalist China regularly suffers annual inflation rates of 20 per cent and over, outdoing even India, and recalling the Kuomintang era. But the record of socialist China remains standing testimony to the fact that prices can definitely be controlled by a socialist economy, which places politics in command while ensuring a plenitude of production!

The Problem of Mortgaged Land and Benami Land Transfer in Malkangiri District and the Adibasi Sangh's Struggle over It

The economic geography: how the process of exploitation got accentuated:

The recently formed Malkangiri district was the biggest subdivision under undivided Koraput district. It is a part of the eastern Ghat mountain range of Dandakaranya that extends from Bastar of M.P. to East Godavari of A.P. and Gadchiroli of Maharashtra. In this vast area about 68 tribes and subtribes live a substandard life pertaining to little more than primitive economy consisting of food-gathering, hunting and hoeing or ploughing of the land. Among the tribals of Malkangiri the main tribes are Kandha, Keya, Bonda, Didoyee, Paraja, Ganda, Saura, Savar, Bhumiya, Matia, Halba, Gandia, Gadva, Bhatoda, Kumbar, Kumar and Rana, etc. Apart from the tribals, there are some scheduled caste population like Kupiya, Pali, Alnia, Tanti Dama, Basadam, etc.

The economic life of the Adivasis and other poor peasants of Malkangiri faced further crisis after about 40,000 refugees from Bangladesh were settled here in 226 villages under a Central Government scheme between 1964 and 1988. The refugees were settled by Dandakaranya Development Authority (DDA) by cleaning long stretches of jungle to provide each of the settlers' families about five acres of arable and a household plot ranging from 30 to 40 decemels. They were also provided with agricultural implements such as ploughs and bullocks and seeds. Small and medium dams were built for irrigation of their land and ponds were dug for pisciculture. Roads, hospitals and schools were also specially built for the settler villages. They were given free financial aid for one year for maintenance of their families. And most important of all, the appropriate land records of the distributed land were given to the landowners by the DDA after obtaining proper clearance for the same from the Centre.

Side by side and in total contrast, were the Adivasis; among them old inhabitants and the new rehabilitated ones who lost their land due to big dam projects operating in old Koraput district, specially those of Macchakund and subsequently of Balimela. With no clear direction from the authorities, the state rehabilitation officers did not demarcate the distributed land properly. And no land record was prepared and distributed. Even the forest land cleared for them by the state level re-settlement authorities were not properly recorded either by the forest department or by the revenue department. Thus both the departments stake their claim on such land.

Because of bureaucratic callousness or cut of calculated design, proper permission was not obtained from the Centre nor was the land situation conveyed to the Centre, before the new Forest Act came into existence. Moreover, much of the distributed land was shown as forest land in the last settlement. The absolutely corrupt practices of settlement officers did not spare even the old inhabitants, and the land under their possession was shown as forest land.

As a result of all this, even after decades of running from pillar to post, the overwhelming majority of the native Adivasi peasants could not get the much-coveted land *pattas* for the lands which they have been cultivating for generations. Year after year they languish with a sense of insecurity and suffer at the hands of the revenue and forest officers who harass and fleece them on every conceivable pretext. Thus, with regard to the land security and the benefits accruing from it, the anomaly and sharp contrast between the sons of the soil and the Bengali refugee settlers came into sharp focus.

The crisis grew because of yet another factor: that is, the refugees, coming from Bangladesh, were from an advanced state of semi-feudalism whereas the local tribals still languished in the stage of food-gathering and early stage of semi-feudalism. Their primary dependence on the forest started to diminish and slowly shifted to cultivation because of the ruthless loot of forest property by outside traders, contractors, and smugglers side by side with the forest corporation. The forest officials helped to quicken this process, and by the seventies the primary dependence of the tribals shifted from that of forest to the land.

But there was a scarcity of land. The scope for *podu* cultivation got reduced to almost zero. At this stage, taking advantage of their own upper hand socio-economic situation (of having *patta* land, knowledge of better cultivation and knowing the value of the land) and of various developmental projects for Adivasis and Dalits, some of the cleverer refugee settlers started stepping into the *sahukar* (usury) business. They took subsidised loans from the banks and invested part or the whole of this in usury. Their main object being acquisition of

the tribal land, very quickly they mastered the art of manipulating the law, pleasing the officials and hoodwinking the straight and simple Adivasis. By this, these cleverer refugees quickly joined the old horde of *sahukars* already operating in Malkangiri, mainly consisting of Oriyas, Telugus, Punjabis and Marwaris. "*Ghatidian*" is a local name for *dikus* or *sahukars* who crossed the ghats, came here as paupers, but in the course of time, by ruthless exploitation of the tribals, became big landowners or big businessmen. The *adhikaris* or Government officials were of course always there to accentuate the process of such exploitation. Thus the loot of Adivasis and Harijans increased manifold. However, the reason for special mention of these Bengali *dikus* is that whenever Adivasis struggle against exploitation, they try to give it a communal colour or turn, so that the leaders may quit halfway out of sheer embarrassment, and the ordinary masses of Bengalis and Adivasis stay divided, to the detriment of their common interests and struggles.

Causes of mortgage

The need of the tribal for cash mainly arises due to: sudden death or sickness of kith and kin; legal cases; bribes to officials (forest, police, revenue) as and when demanded by them; marriage; rituals related to pregnancy, childbirth and attainment of puberty of the girls; *prayaschit* (a punishment awarded by society on an individual who commits some "social crime". Such crimes include marrying a lower caste person, being beaten by a lower caste person, being beaten with a shoe, going to jail, getting pregnant despite being unmarried, having some wound which turns sore and smells, defying the village deity, etc. Such punishment mainly consists of giving a feast to the whole village by killing some goat or cattle along with rice and wine.)

Apart from these occasions of need, there are *parabs* or festivals that are to be observed by all. They are mainly three -- Pus parab (harvesting festival in December-January), Chaitya parab (hunting festival in April-May) and Bali parab (in July-August). Thus, leaving these general festivals, in all other cases the Adivasi does not know when exactly the need for cash will arise. The element of suddenness in these *pujas*, "*birus*" (rituals to drive away evil spirits), or *prayaschitas* compel him to approach the *Diku*. On the other hand, the *parab* is a general phenomenon which occurs after regular intervals. It does not require much money, but the tribals do not work in the fields during these festivals. Moreover, these *parabs* are observed on different dates by different villages and communities. Thus, though a village observes it just for a week, the district takes two months for the completion of each of the first two *parabs*. Nuakhia and Bali each take three

days. Thus the tribals take about four months holiday from their fields, which cuts into their income considerably and weakens them economically (whereas their Bengali counterparts have no holiday. They get much more produce compared to the tribal.).

Method of mortgage

When the need for money arises due to such social compulsions, the tribal approaches a *sahukar* with the help of a *sartikaria* (middleman). Generally such a *sartikaria* is a Harijan living in tribal villages or a village Nayak or a literate person. *Sartikarias* are of two types. Some, like Ghena Kherasta of Potrel, play the role of professional agents acting in favour of *sahukars*. They look out for a needy peasant, approach and inform him about the intention of a certain *sahukar* who is interested to mortgage or purchase land. Sometimes they, like Hiranya Sanya of Sadasivpur, even advise both *sahukar* and the *rayat* how to proceed and what the terms and conditions should be. The other type of *sartikarias* have nothing to do with the *scarta* or conditions. They are witnesses during the actual transaction and agreement between the *rayat* and *sahukar*. Usually they are the ones who have some connection with a previous mortgaging (of their own land or somebody close to them). In these cases the *rayat* directly approaches the *sahukar*, works out the conditions (rate of "*chhidni*", and so on) and just gets these (two or three) witnesses for the accomplishment of the private deed. So in actual sense of the term, this second type of *sartikarias* are not *sartikarias* but mere witnesses, and the actual *sartikaria* is the *rayat* himself.

However, the Adivasis of Malkangiri are mainly illiterate. The literacy rate among them is less than 10 per cent. Actually, one will rarely find a person in a village who can both read and write. Thus the actual money transaction between a needy tribal and an eager *sahukar* is always falsely recorded in favour of the *sahukar* on some plain paper. Later on, taking advantage of the *desa panchayats* (since these documents have no legal status) these records are produced to take away the concerned Adivasi's land as mortgaged to the *sahukar* in lieu of the loan given to him.

The traditional debt system involving land mortgage brings in the "*chhidni*" question in the whole of undivided Koraput. Under this system, the *diku* or *sahukar* takes the peasant's land by loaning some amount urgently needed by him. Generally the amount is not very big and ranges from Rs 500 to Rs 5000. As a rate of *chhidni* some amount is fixed at the whim of the *sahukar* (and certain conditions are also imposed). "*Chhidni*" means an annual cut from the main loan amount formally agreed between the two parties -- *rayat* and *sahukar*. In some

cases, such *chhidnis* vary from Rs 25 upto Rs 4000, supposedly depending on the type of land. In other cases, no such *chhidni* is fixed and the main loan remains constant while all the produce of the mortgaged land goes towards interest. In cases where *chhidnis* are implemented, the mortgaged land is supposed to be released after such annual cuts completely exhaust the main loan. But generally, the fixation of such *chhidnis* is so arbitrary in nature and the *sahukars* are so adept at manipulating and exploiting the innocence of the Adivasi peasants, that the release of the land, once mortgaged, becomes next to impossible.

The extent of arbitrariness in fixing the *chhidni* is really alarming. Say, for example, the land of Ramachandra Madkani of village Seema Konda, amounting to seven acres, which was taken over by Biswapati Biswas. This land was mortgaged to him for Rs 7,000 and the *chhidni* was fixed at Rs 1,000. This being class one land the cost of its annual product could be calculated at Rs 3200 per acre at the minimum (at the rate of Rs 200 per quintal of paddy, which is really Rs 300 -- that is, assuming that there is no distress sale). Thus it comes to Rs 22,400. But the arbitrariness of *chhidni* allowed the *sahukar* to cultivate the land for seven years. Even after these seven years, he again gave Rs 1,500 to the peasant and cultivated the land for one more year. Thus, with just Rs 8,500 the *sahukar* earned, at the most conservative estimate, about Rs 1,79,200! And yet the *sahukar* was not prepared to part with the land.

Apart from such arbitrariness in fixing the *chhidni* (where no rationale is involved except that of the dire need of the hapless peasant), in many cases, the *sahukars* impose such conditions as those reminiscent of the medieval system of serfdom. Under these conditions the peasant is forced to work as a labourer on a meagre wage on the lands of the *sahukar*, or he is forced to keep his kith and kin as a "*goti*" (just like a serf), bonded to the *sahukar* on a nominal wage. One such example is that of Bhaven Mandal of M.V. 103, who gave Rs 1,200 to Samra Padiami of Puspali and took his one and a half acres recorded in Khatian No. 14 as plot no. 199. The annual *chhidni* for this class one land (Bedha Jami) was fixed at Rs 300. As a condition Bhaven Mandal forced Samra Padiami to stay as a *goti* not in his house but in the house of Biswapati Biswas to whom he (Bhaven) owed some money. Samra Padiami received as wage Rs 100 per month for two years.

Dispossession through benami transfers: *Sahukars* do not always stop even at such medieval exploitation. In many cases they finally dispossess the peasant of his land once and for all by cheating him

and making a sale deed without his knowledge, by *benami* transfer or by forcibly making him agree to sign the sales deed. This is always done with the connivance of the competent revenue officials.

No doubt there have been many laws both before and after 1947 to check land transfer to non-Adivasis in the agency areas. According to the Act enacted in 1956 known as "Orissa Regulation -- 2", seizure, possession, exchange, lease sale, gift or any such act of transfer of land belonging to an Adivasi will be regarded as illegal, unless there is proper permission by a higher revenue officer of the rank of R.O. or sub-collector. Section 22 of the OIR Act restricts such transfers, and the district welfare department is authorised to supervise such cases by going to the spot to see whether the selling party is really aggrieved and the rate is appropriate and no fraud is done, etc. But nothing of the kind ever takes place. In almost all cases of land transfer none of the government officers go for the on-the-spot verification. They do not even verify whether the seller is the real owner of the land. They almost always act as the paid servants of the *sahukars* who are dispossessing the Adivasi peasants of their lands in one way or the other.

One such case is that of Gada Bhumiya of Chitapani one, who took a loan of Rs 2,000 from Bijay Naik, an employee in Orissa State Electricity Board, in 1982. After five years, ie in 1987, Naik demanded Rs 7,000 from Gada Bhumiya knowing full well that the latter could not pay the sum. When Gada expressed his inability to pay this much, and agreed to pay Rs 4,000 after the harvest, Bijay did not agree and demanded he make a sale deed of his HC.1 of land plot no. 242 of K.N. 6 in the name of Dasrath Burudi, belonging to Chitapani-1. However, Burudi never took possession of the said land. It was occupied by Bijay Naik. Later on, in 1988, when Gada Bhumiya came to know that Bijay Naik's wife Basanti Lata Naik, a non-tribal teacher, had applied for permission to purchase that land, he opposed it at the sub-collector's office. He continued to file repeated objections till 1991. But in spite of this on March 10, 1991, the permission was granted by the sub-collector without hearing Gada Bhumiya.

Another such case relates to Sanu Madkani, a Kandha Adivasi peasant belonging to village Pagri Puspali. Since he is an alcoholic, Biswapati Biswas loaned him small amounts over a period of two years. After two years Biswas informed the peasant that he has taken a loan of Rs 7,000 and for that he must part with his 11 acres of land (plot nos. 239, 240, 243, 213). Later on, he also made a sale deed, and in that deed mentioned having paid the peasant Rs 12,000!

The third type of land transfer relates to *anabadi* land. The peasant Jagannath Dalei took a loan of Rs 18,000 from Dambaru Khilo of

Dyke-3 (same Gram Panchayat) in 1988. For that Khilo took possession of Dalei's two acres of land at village Khadikajodi (Gram Panchayat Nakamamadi). The next year Dalei approached him with the loan amount. But Dambaru Khilo refused to accept and though he harvested the said land, demanded interest. Since it was not the custom to give interest in such cases, Dalei approached the sarpanch for a *vichar*. Khilo did not turn up. This situation continued year after year. In the meantime Dalei left Khadikajodi and came to another village Dum Suliguda, of Potrel Gram Panchayat, 20 km away. In 1995 he approached the Adibasi Sangh and sold the land to Badu Galari of Khadikajodi, since the villagers put a claim on the land and decided likewise. Badu also cultivated the land. But it was found that on the said *anabadi* land there have been encroachment cases twice, one in Dalei's name and another in Dambaru Khilo's name, which is clearly against the existing revenue law.

Thus the general pattern has been that of the *sahukar's* continuous effort not to leave the land to the original peasant, once it comes into his possession. For this he may force the peasant, or take the help of another tribal to carry out a *benami* transfer, or carry it out with the help of revenue officials. Thus the alienation of land has been going on unhindered. To date 120 such cases have come to the notice of the Sangh.

Building the struggle, cautiously but steadily

As far as peasants' consciousness and preparedness are concerned, the issue of mortgaged lands and fraudulent land transfers has been somewhat different from the issues of "*panu*" extractions (illegal taxes by police, revenue and forest officials) and arbitrary takeover of Adivasi peasants/village lands for afforestation (by soil conservation or forest departments). The arbitrariness and outrageous nature of these extractions and takeovers have been openly visible, affecting collectively a large number of peasants, if not all, of the village. It has been relatively easier for the people to perceive their common interest and gather courage to rally into struggles against them. The Malkangiri Zilla Adibasi Sangh could expeditiously work out its struggle policies on these issues and organise large scale mass struggles on them in different pockets of the district in a relatively shorter span of time.

On the other hand, though the issue of mortgaged lands and fraudulent transfers is also very important as it affects the vital interests of the Adivasi peasants, so far as mobilising the people and building up the struggle over it is concerned, there exist some complicating factors that come in the way. The first one among these factors is that it affects the individual peasants separately, ie, it affects them on different

occasions and in somewhat different conditions. Besides, the arbitrarily fixed *chhidni* rates and other imposed conditions, which are brought into operation in the form of formal mutual agreements between the peasant and the *sahukar* (in spite of their totally unequal respective situations and considerations) are usually kept as a secret -- by the peasants because of ignorance and false sense of prestige, and by the *sahukar* for ulterior motives. In a way this practice of *chhidni* is intertwined with not only the economic life of the peasants but also with their social life in the community, because of the Adivasis' innocent but misplaced sense of morality. Due to this, the peasant cannot easily realise and question the injustice perpetrated by the *sahukar*, as it might be maligned by the *sahukar* as the peasant's going back on his word given at the time of taking the loan. Even when a peasant realises and resents such injustice, he refrains from putting up a struggle either out of the fear that the *sahukar* will not give him a loan again and he does not have any alternative source of credit when another need arises, or out of the fear of the *sahukar's* ruthless muscle power. Over and above all this, in cases of *benami* land transfer, there is the fear of harassment through litigation and the might of officialdom. All these factors necessitate greater democratic education and organisational preparation (to rally other villagers) before taking up struggle on these issues.

A more complicating factor has been that it is not only a few unscrupulous *sahukars* but also many middle peasants, particularly among the Bengali peasants, who have been indulging in the practice of keeping poor peasants' lands under mortgage through the *chhidni* system. This makes it possible for the *sahukar* to mobilise sections of the middle peasants against the poor peasants. Particularly so for the Bengali *sahukars* to mobilise entire Bengali villages on communal lines against the protesting Adivasis. All this necessitated a differentiated, flexible and even selective approach in dealing with the cases of mortgaged land or *benami* transfers to win over the middle peasants and isolate the *sahukars*; to take particular care to thwart the attempts of the *sahukars* or other vested interests for creating communal tensions and even to minimise the scope for all the *sahukars* getting united against the *rayats* in the initial stage itself.

Keeping all the above mentioned considerations in mind, the Sangh leadership proceeded step by step, in two phases, with due caution and care towards building the struggle on the issues of mortgaged land and fraudulent transfers.

In the first phase initially (in 1992-93) it did not directly initiate or intervene (because of lack of sufficient information and preparation) but extended moral support through its panchayat level units to the

aggrieved peasants in some villages when they took to struggle to take possession of their mortgaged lands -- as in the case of Ramachandra Madkani of village Seema Kanda. Later in 1993-94 the Sangh selectively (where the Sangh was strong and the peasant firm) took up three cases of fraudulent land transfer. The first one related to about seven acres of village Puspali; the second one related to about two and a half acres of Chitapani-1; and the third one related to about four and a half acres of RHC-11. In all the three cases the people of the concerned villages were mobilised in support of the aggrieved peasant and all the concerned land was forcibly possessed and given to the concerned *rayat*. In the first case there was crop seizure, and in the latter two cases forcible cultivation by the *rayat* with the help of the Sangh. While mainly relying on organising such mass struggles the Sangh subsequently instituted some legal cases too against the *sahukars* on behalf of the *rayats*. It has been extensively using these cases to expose the exploitation and fraud perpetuated by the *sahukar*-administration combine.

Of these three struggles, the struggle for the land of Gada Bhumiya belonging to Chitapani village was of particular significance. In this case, the *sahukar* involved was an Oriya *sahukar* and there was continued repression from the administration. The harvested crop was seized by the revenue inspector and two police cases were foisted on Gada Bhumiya. In spite of such harassment, the Sangh stood by Gada Bhumiya in every possible way and the land continues to be under his possession. The extensive and steadfast campaign conducted by the Sangh in this case, against the Oriya *sahukar* and the administration, had another significant effect. It helped to blunt the attempts of the Bengali *sahukars* to create communal tensions in cases relating to them.

Spurred by the primary successes in these three cases and by the campaign in connection with them, the peasants started bringing hordes of cases of land mortgage and fraudulent land transfer to the Sangh. Consequently, the Sangh proceeded to take up these issues for organising struggles in a relatively more comprehensive way. It stepped up its general campaign on these issues and simultaneously took to conducting a survey with the help of the Ganatantrik Adhikar Suraksha Sangathan, a democratic rights organisation of Orissa, to dig out the *modus operandi* and concrete facts on these issues. To ensure participation of the people in this investigation, the Sangh publicised it widely through issuing press statements and holding meetings in different panchayats.

Simultaneously, the Sangh raised the slogan of fixing a commonly acceptable rational basis for fixing the rate of *chhidni*, which hitherto

has been entirely dependent on the whims of the *sahukars*. With this slogan the Sangh held extensive discussions with the *rayats* and also accosted the *sahukars* and the administration. It also held a big rally of the *rayats* which was also attended by some representatives of the *sahukars*. In this meeting various aspects of the issue were openly debated. Through these discussions it was decided that since land mortgaging cannot be totally stopped as of now (as long as alternative public sources of credit are not available and particularly as long as the lack of legal security of land possessions prevail), at least some justifiable norms for fixing the rate of *chhidni* that are transparent and commonly applicable be established.

Confronted with this mobilisation of democratic opinion, the *sahukars* took a defensive posture. They, particularly the Bengali *sahukars*, started posing as merely rich peasants cultivating the lands of the Adivasi peasants as sharecroppers, ie, having taken these lands on sharecropping in lieu of the loan given to the peasants, which could be treated as advance payment of the share of the owner-peasant. They even appealed that the norm that emerged in the famous Tebhaga peasant movement of Bengal of 1946, where two-thirds of the produce goes to the sharecropper and one-third to the owner, should be taken as the basis of fixing the *chhidni*. But when it was suggested that, as per their claim, the norm of fixing one-third of the value of the total crop raised from the owner's land should be fixed as the rate of *chhidni*, ie, the amount to be deducted from the total amount of loan given, the *sahukars* pleaded that since they paid the money in advance as a loan, they should be allowed to take a certain further amount as interest. Obviously, there is an essential difference between a normal sharecropper and these *sahukars* who are taking the lands of peasants under duress. Nevertheless, out of the consideration that these arguments have the potential of swaying the Bengali middle peasants and also taking into account the limitations of the preparatory phase of the peasant movement, the Sangh decided to concede these arguments at least for the time being. Accordingly, drawing upon the immediate interests and consent of the *rayats*, the Sangh hammered out the following agreement as the rational frame that is binding on all for deciding the rate of *chhidni*: The total produce from the land will be divided into four parts and one such fourth part will be regarded as the justifiable *chhidni*. The difference between one third and one fourth of the produce (ie, 8.33 per cent) will be regarded as interest on the loan and may be taken by the *bandhadharus*.

Further, on this basis the following norms were decided: the average produce will be calculated according to the kind and area of the land; the value of the produce will be calculated according to the rate

prevailing in the market (not as fixed by the government since it is never the actual market price). Thus as per the current market prices, it was decided that: For class one land (locally known as "*bedha*" and recorded as "*dhana-1*" in the *patta* and is deep, can be irrigated, and gives the highest produce of paddy, groundnut, and *rashi*) the annual rate of *chhidni* will be between Rs 600 and Rs 800 per acre. For class two land (locally known as "*atla*" *jami* or plain land, recorded as "*dhana-2*", yielding paddy, alsi oil seed, and *jana* [jowar]), the annual rate of *chhidni* will be between Rs 400 and Rs 550 per acre. And for class three land (*banjar* land shown as No.3 in land records, generally stretches of land with some elevation, generally producing *mandia*, *jana*, *badjana*, *suan*, and *kanju*) the annual rate of *chhidni* will be between Rs 250 and Rs 350 per acre. These agreed norms and rates were declared and widely publicised through a leaflet by the Sangh in August 1995.

The ongoing survey and popularisation of the above agreement not only greatly enthused the *rayats* but also created a great commotion in the camp of the *bandhadharus*.

The lower and middle peasant section of the *bandhadharus* approached the Sangh. They pleaded that they are not *sahukars* and are cultivating the Adivasi *rayats*' lands out of sheer necessity. They readily accepted the norms set and the *chhidni* rates fixed but pleaded with the Sangh not to apply it with retrospective effect since they cannot pay the *rayats*' share of the crops they raised previously. They requested the Sangh to mediate an amicable settlement and fresh agreement with the *rayats*. As the *rayats* too were considerate, the Sangh decided to pursue a flexible approach towards them.

At the same time, the *sahukars* and big peasant section of *bandhadharus* started attempts to thwart the agreement by playing dirty tricks. On the one hand, they were approaching the Sangh with their grievances or grudges about the kind and area of land to plead for reduction in the rate of *chhidni* and even offered to give generous donations to the Sangh. On the other hand, they were trying to prevent the *rayats* from telling the truth to the Sangh cadre at the time of the survey or taking their cases to the Sangh, by various means -- exerting social pressure through agent *sartikarias*; luring them with offers of further loans; and browbeating them with threats of physical reprisals. Further, they tried to sway the Bengali peasant *bandhadharus* with the malicious propaganda that all their crops and lands will be seized and all the loans given by them will be declared as annulled by the Sangh. They even desperately tried to close their ranks, mobilise goonda forces and intimidate the people through a show of strength in the villages, lodging false complaints. All this created a lot of tension in the area

in the harvesting season of 1995, and subdued a considerable number of *rayats* in villages where the Sangh's influence was not strong.

However, in villages where the Sangh's influence was strong, the *rayats* were undaunted. They enthusiastically reported their cases to the Sangh cadre and eagerly came forward to get their due or occupy their lands at any cost. Thus, by October 1995, 50 such cases came forward for waging struggle. Nevertheless, keeping in mind the inadequacies in the survey conducted or the limitations of the existing organisational preparations, and also with the important consideration of differentiating between the lower section of *bandhadharus* and the *sahukars*, the Sangh selected 10 cases for active struggle. In these villages the Sangh made extensive preparations for mass mobilisation and for self-defence (to repulse the attacks of the *sahukars'* goondas) at the time of harvesting. With such preparations, it made concrete struggle plans either for crop seizure and repossession of the lands under the occupation of the *sahukars* or for preventing the *sahukars* to usurp the crops from the lands under the *rayats'* possession, depending on the nature of the case involved. The fighting spirit and confidence in the success of the struggle ran infectiously high.

Right at this moment, there was a last-ditch malicious attempt by the district collector too, to subvert the approach and struggle plans of the Sangh. Posing himself as more radical than the Sangh leadership, the district collector tried to incite the *rayats* into an all-out struggle against all Bengali *bandhadharus* and throw them out of the possession of the lands. He even threw a sop to the *rayats* in the form of a promise to form a cooperative bank to give loans to the needy under the Sangh's leadership. For a time this caught both the Adivasi peasants and the Bengali peasants unawares and frayed tempers on communal lines. Had the collector succeeded in his machination, it would have united all *bandhadharus* against the *rayats* and frustrated their struggle. But the Sangh cadre and leadership, being always on the alert, intervened in a timely way to foil the collector's attempts. They effectively exposed the motives and implications of his plans and stuck to the originally decided approach and struggle plans. With this, the collector's and *sahukars'* attempts were foiled and the agitated Bengali peasant section of *bandhadharus* heaved a sigh of relief and even extended moral support to the Sangh. Finally, except in one case where the *rayat* backed out, in all the cases the struggles ended in impressive success.

The approach of the Sangh and these successes of the October-November 1995 struggles, apart from fulfilling the immediate interests of the concerned *rayats*, have a wider and far-reaching significance. As already evident, they boost the democratic awareness, confidence

and struggle preparedness of not only the aggrieved *rayats*, but also of the struggling masses of other villages in the district. The experiences gained in countering and foiling the enemy tactics -- diversionary, divisive, alluring and intimidatory -- and in uniting and organising struggling masses will serve as beacons for organising further struggles more swiftly and sweepingly. Similarly, they contribute to dispel the apprehensions of the Bengali peasants and to unite Bengalis and the Adivasis by overcoming mutual mistrust, thus paving the way for isolating the *sahukars* and landlords and building a more sustained and thoroughgoing struggle on the issues of mortgaged lands and fraudulent transfers throughout the district. Moreover, as the democratic revolutionary leadership of the Sangh is aware, the back-breaking severity and medieval crudity of these twin forms of plunder become pervasive not just because of the belligerent greed of the *sahukars* and landlords, but more because of the utter lack of any security of economic life and particularly land, which on both counts is a direct outcome of the State's land and forest laws, along with their skewed application by the administration. By training the struggling masses through education and political propaganda during these struggles to firmly and coherently grasp these linkages, the democratic revolutionary leadership of the Sangh is preparing to dovetail the struggle over the issues of mortgaged lands and fraudulent transfers with the struggle of all peasant masses to win their right and control over land and forests. Thus, the Sangh is proceeding in the direction of advancing the present economic and democratic struggles into a sweeping agrarian revolutionary movement.

A Landmark Peasant Struggle in Malkangiri

-- A Correspondent

For about four months now, (ie November 1995 to March 1996), under the leadership of the Malkangiri Zilla Adivasi Sangh, the adivasi peasant masses in two panchayats of Malkangiri district of Orissa state have been waging a death-defying struggle against the anti-people machinations, criminal loot of their forest assets and intimidatory attacks by the forest contractor-politician-administration combine of the area.

Outwardly, at a general democratic level, this struggle attracted the attention of the democratic minded people outside, as having focussed the issues of environment (forest protection), official corruption and cheating of adivasis, etc. But more significantly, as is borne out by the actual course of the struggle at the ground level, this struggle symbolised the transformation of the pent-up urges of these peasant masses into their growing awareness of the need to fight for their basic legitimate demands of A) right to security of land (prompt sanction of *pattas* of all the lands of all adivasi peasants, with the adoption of a transparent and uniform policy), and B) right to control over their forest assets.

In fact this struggle has catapulted these peasant masses from a state of docile existence into the ambit of self-organisation, political awareness and democratic assertion of their collective will in opposition to the arbitrary socio-political authority of the anti-people combine.

I. A Brief Background

The struggle that had started in November-December 1995 has been concentrated consecutively in two pockets. The first is a cluster of villages -- Tulenguda (the confrontation spot), Kanjoli, Boilapari, Akur, Pitatang, Khodiapodar, Photitang, etc. of Padmagiri panchayat (about 25 km from Malkangiri district headquarters by road and 15 km by

forest route). The second is another cluster of villages -- Rangamatiguda (the confrontation spot), Padarapali, Durmaguda, Pedakunda, Matiguda, Gudnad, Manga, etc. of the Pandaripani panchayat (about the same distance from Malkangiri in another direction by road, but only 10-12 km away from the first one by interior village route). Both panchayats belong to the same Malkangiri block of Malkangiri district. All these villages come under the Pandaripani forest beat (also known as Akur jungle) of the Malkangiri forest range. This forest area borders on the Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh state.

The adivasis of these villages, along with those of Moupodar, Kottapalli, Bhejaguda, etc panchayats in the area, mostly belong to the Koya tribe. Over the decades, they have been leading a life of utter scarcity with no security of the lands they have been cultivating for generations. Simultaneously, there has been a constant further deprivation and severe harassment through "*panu*" extractions (arbitrary unofficial collection of taxes on the minor forest produce taken by the adivasis for their household needs or on any other pretext) by the forest, revenue and police officials.

Over and above such deprivation and oppression, which are common to all other parts of the district, the peasants of this border area were bonescared of another phenomenon that was going on in the mid and late eighties, particularly in Moupodar, Kottapalli, and Padmagiri panchayats. They frequently came across a most intriguing and frightening scene of convoys of 20-30 persons or more (mostly adivasi labour, some of whom they knew) carrying headloads or cycle loads under the menacing guard of 20-30 armed thugs (mostly outsiders) on either side, passing through the forest routes. A simple question, or even an inquisitive look, used to invite harsh treatment. The Sangh activists too faced such situations. These loads and the armed thugs belonged to a dreaded gang leader, G. Subhash Chandra Bose, who hailed from the neighbouring Andhra state and was engaged in the smuggling of the highly valuable tin stones from here to Madhya Pradesh and Andhra. Padmagiri was the loading centre of the ore of these stones, the processing centre being at Musabandhi of Moupadar panchayat. This notorious smuggler employed hundreds of adivasis in his smuggling activity. Apart from the fifty or more armed thugs brought from outside, the entire officialdom and the police were on his regular pay rolls and he kept entire panchayats on a tight leash.

Nobody had seen him. But stories about his demonic activities and the extent of his power had unnerved the people of this entire belt to such an extent that once in 1990, when the Sangh tried to hold a mass meeting through some existing youth contacts, literally no one attended it saying blankly that they have no problems and do not

need any organisation. The Sangh published an article expressing the goings on in the area but the Government took no action.

Such adversity was compounded by another factor. Being on the border of Bastar district, the people in these parts were in the know of the People's War Group's adventurist actions, and having faced the negative consequences (police harassment, etc) of the forays of the squads of that group into these parts, along with their rude behaviour with the people, these masses were under the influence of negative ruling class propaganda against the democratic revolutionary forces. They were apprehensive of the motives and methods of anybody who advocated democratic struggle and organisation.

However, the Sangh developed fast and became strong in other parts of the district. The influence of the struggles led by the Sangh and of its distinct democratic approach started percolating into these parts. With this advantage and widely acknowledged credibility behind it, the Sangh cadre from other parts made persistent efforts and succeeded in organising successful mass struggles in some panchayats -- Moupodar, Kottapalli, Bhejaguda, etc. of this belt, subsequently. Thus, the Sangh got established in some degree or the other in some panchayats in this belt. But in other panchayats, the diffidence of the people could not still be overcome and the Sangh, in spite of having some militant contacts, could not take stable roots in the first cited cluster of villages in the Padmagiri panchayat and it was non-existent in the latter cited cluster of villages in Pandaripani panchayat, before the start of the current struggle in November 1995.

On the other hand, in the last week of May 1995, the marking of the trees was carried out in the first cluster of villages and some trees were even felled. The people of these villages were disturbed but did not know why and who was doing it. With the onset of monsoon, the felling was stopped. The people were relieved. But their relief was short-lived. To their utter shock, the felling of the huge sal, teak, sisu, pipal and other trees of this 250-year-old forest was commenced again on a massive scale in October 1995, in Tulenguda.

For generations, the people of all nearby villages, including two Bengali villages, were drawing subsistence from this patch of the forest (despite *panu* extractions). They were agitated at the prospect of losing it altogether. Besides, they were perplexed. Over the years, whenever they procured some dry wood from the forest or even when they cut the trees on their own lands, they have been harassed and hounded with persecutions by the officials because it was "against the law". And now, this unhindered large scale destruction!

On enquiry, they were told the felling was being carried out by G. Subhash Chandra Bose (who had by now become a forest contractor

with the wealth he amassed as a smuggler earlier). On hearing this horrifying name, the villagers were scared. The Sangh organised a mass meeting October 30 1995 and submitted a memorandum to the district administration. But the administration did not take any action. And, notwithstanding some stray voices of protest, the people did not come into direct action. The felling continued unabated and the restlessness of the people was growing. Further, the transport of the timber too had begun. The militant contacts of the Sangh from Padmagiri rushed to the district office of the Sangh in the third week of November 1995 and urged the leadership to take up the issue seriously and immediately.

II. The Problem before the Sangh and Its Decisions

This was a very difficult but crucial moment. Besides the earlier mentioned adverse factors, there were other subjective difficulties. The democratic revolutionary mass leaders who have provided democratic guidance and assistance to the Sangh from outside were too few in number. The Sangh functionaries and the good number of determined and dedicated cadre who have been effectively leading various struggles on their own, were now finding themselves inadequately equipped to deal with this particularly powerful as well as cunning enemy. Besides, the manner of his present operation appeared so dubious that it could create confusion and contradictions among the affected people. Without sufficiently exposing his motives and methods of operation, it was difficult to unite and build confidence among the people. And it appeared difficult for the Sangh to do this on its own, without drawing cooperation and support of other democratic forces and people. On the other hand, if this treacherous operation -- which, apart from pushing the people further away from winning their basic rights over land and forest, was hitting at even their immediate meagre economic sustenance -- was allowed to succeed without resistance, it would take very long before the confidence of the people (in themselves and in the Sangh) could be gained again. In a way, it appeared to be a now-or-never situation, at least as far as this pocket was concerned.

Taking all factors into serious consideration, on 21st November 1995, the district executive committee of the Sangh decided the following: to build mass resistance against the felling and transportation of the trees; to expose the configuration of the enemy camp and its anti-people manoeuvres; and to unite the people for struggle on their immediate as well as longer-term demands.

With this determination the executive committee of the Sangh decided to take some special measures to cope with the subjective difficulties: Apart from deputing the leading functionaries and full time cadre (both

men and women) from other parts of the district to this new struggle area, it sought the association of a few more democratic revolutionary mass leaders to closely help the Sangh functionaries and cadre in dealing with the enemy and building the mass struggle. It solicited the cooperation of other democratic mass organisations and forces such as the Ganatantrik Adhikar Suraksha Sangathan of Orissa (at the state as well as the district level), and workers' leaders or democratic personages in and around the district, for digging out facts and exposing the enemy camp along with its methods of operation and for building mass democratic opinion and support on a wider scale to this adivasi peasant struggle. Towards the same end a Jungle Suraksha Sangharsh Samity too was formed. Armed with these measures, the Sangh functionaries and cadre, accompanied by some democratic revolutionary mass leaders from outside, plunged into immediate action to face the challenging tasks ahead, with full conviction in the struggle aspirations of the people, notwithstanding their fear complex.

III. Leadership's Courage and Skill -- Hesitant Protest Turned into Grim Fight

On 22nd November, while a small team of this leading struggle-force went on the job of accosting and moving the administration, another bigger team of this leading struggle-force proceeded to Padmagiri to mobilise people to organise direct action in the field. The next seven days proved to be momentous for not only this leading struggle-force and for the people of this struggle-area, but also for the entire peasant movement developing under the leadership of the Sangh.

Before leaving for Padmagiri, the leading struggle-team met the District Collector in Malkangiri and demanded to know what the administration is doing about the goings-on in the villages of Padmagiri panchayat. In a placatory tone, the Collector said that the felled trees were on the private lands of the Tulenguda peasants who might have sold them to the contractor, that the contractor claims to have got a High Court order permitting him to transport the timber and that he would go into the matter as soon as possible. The team questioned the administration's responsibility in allowing such large-scale destruction of adivasis' forest assets without even proper spot-verification. While submitting a memorandum demanding immediate enquiry, the team forewarned the Collector of the possible consequences of the reaction of the people, and of the Sangh's determination to resist this illegitimate act of the contractor. The Collector tried to dissuade the team from going there and organising resistance, saying that the contractor appears to be a dangerous element (as if he were concerned

about the safety of the team members), and that he would do whatever was legally possible very soon. When the team refused to relent and warned the Collector that he would be held responsible for whatever happened at the felling spot, the Collector finally agreed to visit the place for enquiry, on November 24th. This encounter with the Collector gave the leading team an indication of how things might have been manipulated by the contractor, and their insistence on immediate spot-verification was with the idea of getting to the bottom of things and exposing the enemy's game plan before the affected people.

The eventful night

Immediately, the leading team proceeded to attend to the crucial task -- of preparing the ground, the people. Covering a large part of the distance by foot, the team reached Padmagiri, the panchayat centre, on the same day evening. But there was no one to receive them in spite of prior information. The people, both adivasi and Bengali, were afraid even to talk to them. In the bazaar, a stronghold of the contractor, there were some hostile glances too, thrown at them. Well, it was nothing unexpected.

The team proceeded further, walking another 5-6 kms, deep into the panchayat. Crossing two Bengali villages, they reached the adivasi village, Kanjoli. By then, it was dark, silent, and being winter, cold. No human being could be seen outside. All the doors of the thatched houses were shut. For a while the team-members did not know what to do. After consulting the team-leader, they started raising slogans: Adivasi Sangh Zindabad! Inquilab Zindabad! The forest belongs to the Adivasis! We will not allow transportation of timber! Timber smuggler contractor, Murdabad! Contractor's atrocities, Murdabad!, etc. But, even after half an hour of slogan shouting, nobody came out. Only a few heads, peeping through the half-open doors, could be seen. Further slogan shouting. Finally, after about 45 minutes of slogan shouting, a youth came out and met the team and took them to his house. Convinced of the genuineness of the purpose of the team's visit and of its determination to pursue it, he volunteered to participate in the Sangh's struggle programme against the contractor's anti-people operation. He informed that already six timber-loaded trucks had sped out. There was no time to lose. The youth went and gathered a few villagers for a short meeting. Looking at each other they nodded in agreement. The need to mobilise all the people of this village and other villages to block further transport of the timber was explained. With half-appreciation and half-fear, they approved. By then it was about 9 p.m. of 22nd November.

After making arrangements to rally these people immediately to Tulenguda -- the felling spot -- with their traditional weapons, and sending volunteers to Boilapari and other surrounding villages to mobilise people from there too in the same way, the team started marching to Tulenguda, 2-3 km away from Kanjoli. It was dark and the team was armed with only some *tangias* and axes. When they were about two km away from Tulenguda, they could faintly hear a truck approaching from a distance. How to stop the truck until the people arrive there? Again consultations with the team-leader and a decision. Some people cut trees on either side of the forest road and laid them on the road. A makeshift bridge was broken. At this time, criss-crossing through the logs on the road, a motorcycle with three persons sped past the team towards Tulenguda. The team camped by the side of the road, huddled under the trees in the chilly night and kept a watchful eye on the road. After some time the contractor and one or two of his men on a motorcycle sped into Tulenguda. They were accompanied by the first motorcycle that went to Padmagiri. It was around 11 p.m. by now. People from villages, some with their traditional weapons -- bows and *tangias* -- started trickling in and joined the team, anxiety as to what was going to happen now writ on their faces. In a short while the war of attrition started with the bands of armed mercenaries of the contractor who returned from Tulenguda.

First came a serious attack. The contractor's truck, fully packed with all the contractor's men with small and big arms, came rushing. Some more of them were following the truck. The team-members, led by the General Secretary, jumped onto the road, with some of the more courageous village people following, and they blocked the road. The truck stopped. The staff and goondas got down with threats of assault if the way were not cleared. The team members did not budge, but the situation was precarious. The contractor's force was altogether of about 150 and the people blocking the road were hardly about 25-30. A flash of thought: More than half of the contractor's men seemed to be adivasi labour. The Sangh leaders started addressing them: The Sangh is the self-organisation of all adivasis. It is fighting to defend the interests of the adivasis, to secure their legitimate rights and against the exploitation and oppression by the *sahukars*, landlords, contractors and *sarkari babus*. You too are oppressed adivasis. We are not against you. We know you have come on this job just to earn some wages to feed your families. You are paid for the job you have done. You are not paid to get killed. Why are you risking your life like this for this sinister contractor who is acting against all adivasis? and so on. There was a perceptible change. The adivasi labour stepped aside, in

spite of the goondas' warnings. Now, the balance of forces became a little bit more even; still, the contractor's force was bigger than the resisting force. But the real difference was in the strength of conviction and courage to risk their lives. Mocking at the goondas' weapons and their menacing attempts to attack, the resisting force declared: some of us might get killed but you too cannot go back safe; at any cost we will not allow the truck to pass! Faced with such rare death-defying courage, the contractor's mercenaries lost their nerve and beat a retreat. The truck went back.

The three motorcyclists mentioned earlier started arguing with the team with aggressive gestures. Their leader turned out to be the elder brother of the Kanjoli youth who first volunteered to participate in the Sangh's programme. He started abusing the people and threatening the team: Why have they gathered there? Why have they blocked the road? If they do not disperse, there will be serious consequences, and so on. The team-members calmly explained their mission. Inspired by their skillful exposition, the Kanjoli youth militant countered his elder brother spiritedly: what wrong is the Sangh doing? They have come to serve the people selflessly. Why are you doing *dalaali* of the contractor and acting against the people, and so on and so forth. The gang went back towards Malkangiri swearing at the team. People felt proud and admired the courage of the youth from their own village.

At about 4 a.m. in the morning another gang led by a bigger leader, the ex-block chairman belonging to the Janata Dal, came to the spot from Malkangiri. With a view to driving a wedge between the people and the Sangh, the Janata Dal ex-chairman started flinging derogatory accusations at the team-members, and particularly at the General Secretary of the Sangh: Are you a real adivasi? You are a converted one. What do you know of the adivasis? Why have you come to this area? Why have you brought this rank outsider (referring to the team leader)? Why are you inciting these tribals and inviting trouble for them? The General Secretary gave a fitting reply. Why are you so headstrong? Just because you are a block chairman? Having remained a chairman myself for longer terms than you, in the past, I know the worth of this chairmanship better. What is it that a chairman can do for the people, except becoming an instrument for their exploitation and oppression by their tormentors? Is that not what you are doing now? The block chairman changed track: I did not mean to show disrespect to you. Help resolve this trouble peacefully. The contractor is a generous man. You will stand to benefit! The simple reply of the General Secretary was: Do not think that everybody would be like you. Instead, go and tell your contractor to stop this loot of the people. The people around were keenly listening to this verbal duel, beginning

to realise the moral strength and loyalty of the Sangh leadership to the interests of the people.

Finally, the contractor himself reached the spot from Malkangiri at about 4 a.m.. Without showing any aggression, he wanted a rapprochement, and started mouthing pleasantries: Earlier I did not know about the Sangh. Only now I have come to know of it. I am not against the Sangh. In fact, I am prepared to contribute to the Sangh. I will not take the timber now. I only want to take the empty truck. The Sangh should allow it.

The team gave a measured reply: We are not here to seize the truck or block it forever. First the spot-verification should take place as promised by the Collector and only then anything can be thought of. Before that nothing will be allowed to pass from here. Dumbfounded, the contractor was finding it difficult to hide his rage. He started making veiled threats: I am not going to lose anything and can take care of everybody; it is not going to be good for the Sangh if it does not relent, because then I will be forced to call for the police and mobilise my other forces too into action. The cool but firm reply was that the Sangh and the people are prepared for any eventuality. Left with no option the contractor made an ignominious retreat.

Surge in people's confidence and mobilisation

By then the night was wearing out and the dead-tired team members, and the people with them, could think of some rest, while recalling with satisfaction all that they had achieved in that one eventful night. Even such a small people's force could rebuff a villainous and brutal force; at least for the time being, because they dared to fight with determination. The Sangh functionaries and cadre began to feel fresh self-confidence and capability to deal with such adversities (as encountered during the entire night), either with regard to the enemy or with regard to the people. The people began to feel sure about the dependable integrity, reassuring fighting spirit and reliable leadership qualities of the Sangh's leading force. And most importantly, the people were beginning to break free from their fear complex and realise their hitherto dormant fighting potential and collective strength. All of these factors came together into an effective springboard for a more resolute and inspired people's struggle in the days to follow.

23-24 November: As the decisions and programmes taken by the Sangh spread, the other Sangh cadre and activists from other parts of the district came and took up extensive propaganda and mobilisation work. Particularly as the word, rather the story, of the leading team's and the people's heroic deeds the previous night spread through the villages, people of all the nearby villages started banding together and

discussing animatedly as to what the enemy was going to do next and what they could do. Nobody knew where the fear that had gripped entire villages had gone. In its place a new realisation began taking root -- that their numerical strength and collective resolve are the real deterrent force that can check or even beat back the enemy's loot and atrocities. Further, the realisation that there is a Sangh that can lead them started generating confidence and fighting zeal among them. They started carrying their bows and arrows to confront the enemy if need be. Even their *singha* (a traditional Koya bugle made out of the horn of the wild buffalo, which the Koyas blow in emergencies to call people in preparation for battle) started being used to gather people quickly. Thus hundreds of people of the nearby villages, particularly of Boilapari, got mobilised under the leadership of the Sangh by 24th November. A people's camp was set up near Boilapari to keep watch on the enemy's camp and to plunge into action to resist any attack by the enemy or to blockade any transportation of timber, if attempted by the enemy. Thus, as promised by the Sangh's leading struggle-force on the 22nd night, the people were prepared for any eventuality.

On the other side, the contractor too kept his promise to call the police and all his "other forces" -- the array of ruling class political leaders, cutting across party lines, in the area, and goonda gangs from outside -- into action.

Unfolding of the enemy's network and game plan

By the morning of the 23rd, at 7 a.m., the forester of Pandaripani beat came to the spot and threatened the leaders that he would take action against them for their unlawfully cutting trees from the road and forest. By the afternoon, the Additional District Magistrate (ADM), the Deputy Superintendent of Police and the Assistant Conservator of Forests came along with a contingent of police to the previous night's confrontation site. First they attempted to browbeat the struggle-leading-force and the people by threatening to take action for blocking the road and stopping the trucks. They were forcefully replied to: How do you know who cut the trees? Could it not be that the contractor's men cut them and the officials are trying to foist a case on the Sangh and the people in order to protect the contractor and his loot of the forest? Further, why are they talking of these few small trees, what about the large plot of the forest that was entirely destroyed just a little distance away? Why don't they go and see for themselves? With such a retort, the Sangh forces and the people (who had already sneaked into those plots and seen the huge logs all around) forced these officials to go to those plots and see the destruction. For a while, they, particularly the ADM, became speechless at the ghastly

sight of the massive destruction. But they started asserting more clearly what the District Collector had indicated on the 22nd -- that the plots of land from which the trees were cut are not part of a reserve forest; that this 150 acres of land belonged, since 1982, to 22 adivasi families of Tulenguda who sold the trees to the contractor; that the contractor had obtained a Timber Transport Permit through a High Court order in 1995; that he is legally entitled to take the timber out and that neither the Sangh nor the other people have any right to obstruct it and if they do so, it will become a criminal offence!

This assertion of seemingly valid legal facts smacked of a carefully manipulated fraud which needed to be gone into and exposed so that people themselves could raise their legitimate grievances. Pending that, the Sangh's struggle-leading-force tactically confined itself to a limited counter: Even if what the officials stated were true, how could they be sure that the felling was limited to the so-called private tenant lands? Was there any verification done? Without such a verification, how can the transport of timber be allowed? So they asserted that whatever be the legal position, they would not allow timber transport until a proper verification was done as promised by the Collector. With this, a mellowed ADC assured the struggle-leading-force that he was aware of the memorandum they submitted to the Collector, that the verification as promised by the Collector would be done and that before the pending verification, he would not allow the transport of timber. But, he requested, the empty truck should be allowed to be taken out. Tactically this request was conceded.

Simultaneously, the same official version of the "legal position" of the felling and timber transport was being sought to be established at the panchayat centre aggressively through a show of "verification" by officials of the police and forest department in the presence of the contractor and the said peasants -- indicating a definite collusion between the administration and the contractor.

When the other Sangh team went and accosted the Chief Conservator of forests at Koraput on 22nd November, he, like the Collector at Malkangiri, tried to placate the team, though in a different way pleading helplessness: that he earlier suffered a severe loss and harassment for having firmly dealt with a similarly powerful contractor in another region; that he, at the fag end of his service, could not risk the same now; that in any case, because of bureaucratic hassles, he could not directly intervene and at best he could instruct the DFO to look into the matter. On the team's insistence, he officially called the DFO and asked him to go and verify the matter on 23rd November, thus washing his hands of the matter. The DFO was sullen but accompanied the team to Padmagiri. On the way, he even tried, in a friendly way, to

figure out how weighty the team members were that they could make the Chief Conservator order him on this verification mission. There at Padmagiri, the panchayat centre, the contractor was already present with a large posse of official as well as unofficial forces -- the Deputy Superintendent of Police, other police officials with a contingent of policemen and a large number of armed henchmen as well as some small and big political leaders of the area. In their respective ways all of them tried to scare away the Sangh activists and people seen in the bazaar. On joining the contractor and his forces, the DFO's behaviour towards the team-members had abruptly changed. As if to show the contractor how loyal he was, even before anything was transacted he started accusing the team members of making unnecessary trouble, whereas nothing illegal was being done by the contractor. For his part, the contractor started abusing and threatening the team-members with dire consequences, while issuing instructions to do this or that to various willing officials. This collaborative show of aggression subsided somewhat with the arrival of the District Collector along with the president of the Sangh.

After some preliminary enquiries the Collector demanded to see the copy of the High Court judgement from the contractor. Since the latter could not produce it the enquiry was postponed to the 24th. On 24th November a meeting was held in the D.C.'s residence where all the contractor's men tried to stop any enquiry. But the Sangh leadership remained firm regarding their demand for a spot enquiry and verification. At last the D.C. conceded the demand. The same day at about 3 p.m. all of them proceeded to the spot and the revenue officials took up verification work on a single 15 acre plot and all trees on it were counted. Then at about 7 p.m. in the evening the enquiry started.

Under such an intimidating atmosphere, some of the complainants of the locality were herded in one after the other. They were sternly asked whether they signed the complaint petition knowingly. Quite visibly under duress, the peasants nodded their heads one after the other, mumbling yes, yes, meekly, with folded hands, and said that they had no idea about the contractor. While the contractor looked triumphant, the DFO and others announced the case as closed and declared that the contractor can transport the remaining timber. But the Collector knew the situation at the disputed site better: That the timber could not be taken out without pacifying or overpowering the people's force there, and the Collector wanted to avoid a violent confrontation. With a show of authority, he announced that on law and order grounds he would not allow the transfer of the timber now and that he would make a joint-verification and ensure a justifiable cost payment for the trees and then decide about the matter.

The contractor and his cohorts must have thought their plot to be foolproof. But it immediately started to get blown to pieces by the questions raised by the democrats around (on the basis of information provided by the emboldened people): If the said plot of land really belonged to these 22 peasants of Tulenguda, how is it that nobody knew it, and all the people of nearby villages, including those of Tulenguda, have been utilising it as a common forest, without anybody raising any objection till recently? And more glaringly, how is it that 10 of these 22 peasants were arrested in 1990 in a "podu" case (illegal clearance and cultivation of reserve forest and) for cultivating the same land which the officials and the contractor were now claiming to be the "private tenant lands" belonging to those very peasants since 1982?

Also, questions arose with regard to the so-called High Court and the timber transfer permit. When, on 25th November, a team of journalists came to the area on the invitation of the Sangh and talked to different people including some of the said tenant peasants of Tulenguda, those tenant peasants clearly stated that except for giving their thumb impressions on some paper once or twice, when the contractor approached them with some inducements, they never knew that some case was fought on their behalf in the High Court nor did they know that any Timber Transfer Certificate was issued in their name. In fact till very recently they did not even know that the said lands belonged to them, nor did they know of any agreement between them and the contractor except the fact that the contractor paid them only a meagre amount supposedly for the trees he was going to take from them. Then how did the High Court order come about? How was the Timber Transfer Permit issued (normally a peasant has to apply for TTP when he wants to sell the trees on his lands and the administration is supposed to issue the permit only after a joint verification and marking of the concerned tenant's land and trees is carried out by the revenue and forest departments)?

True answers to these questions, as found out by the Sangh forces and other democratic forces enquiring from the people and from official sources, revealed a long-drawn-out and deep-rooted fraud perpetrated against the people by the vested interests headed by the contractor. The two essential ingredients of this fraud proved to be, A) on the one hand, exploiting the innocence and economic desperation of the adivasis, through the middlemen; and B) on the other skilfully manipulating the loopholes in the law with the collaboration of the officials, to subvert the interests of the toiling people. The patent method used has been: First the vested interests get some patches of forest recorded as *patta* or tenancy lands of a particular adivasi with the collaboration of the revenue and forest department officials. But even these adivasis are not

informed of this, so that these officials can harass them along with others at least till the time the vested interests decide to use this handiwork. When these interests want to chop down the trees, they get these particular adivasis (in whose name the lands were earlier recorded) to give statements that they have sold the trees to the concerned vested interests. They do this by luring these adivasis through some middlemen who promise them that they can thereafter legally own the land for cultivation. Thus, these adivasis are trapped into serving the vested interests as well as into fighting the other, majority, adivasis who oppose the destruction of the forest which has been their means of livelihood. The vested interests get away with their loot by depicting the adivasis' opposition to the vested interests as a struggle between different sections of adivasis themselves.

This is exactly what the forest contractor and his cohorts have done in the present case. The concrete facts are as follows: This nefarious game was first started by Gangadhar Madhi, a timber merchant earlier and a Congress (I) MLA now. He is one of the main political patrons of Bose now. In 1982, he got the said lands of Tulenguda put in the name of those adivasis, who are Gondia tribals who have migrated to Tulenguda in 1979. In the late eighties, he tried to fell the trees to take the timber out. The then DFO did not allow it on the grounds of law and opposition by the people. In 1987, he filed a case in the name of those tenants against the DFO, in Jeypore district court. The case was rejected then. In 1994, the present contractor, Bose, got the case reopened in the High Court, by filing an appeal in the name of those same tenants who were taken to Jeypore, entertained in a lodge and made to put thumb impressions, beyond which they know nothing. The case-appeal grounds were that those tenants want to sell the trees on their own lands to the contractor but the DFO was not issuing Timber Transport Permits! Simultaneously Bose is believed to have tried to influence Biju Patnaik, with an offer of Rs 60 lakhs, against the DFO. Meanwhile the High Court gave a favourable order and the Government at the state level changed, with the Congress coming to power in 1995. It was easier now. Bose is known to have donated heavily to at least three state level Congress leaders, two of whom are ministers now and one a prominent MLA. At the district level all the ruling class party leaders who contested against each other in the last elections have been the recipients of his favours or even been his business partners -- the Congress, the Janata Dal, the BJP (official and dissident). These favours extend even to many panchayat-block level leaders of those parties. With such political clout he got the earlier DFO transferred and got installed a DFO to his liking. Since

the struggle started, Bose is known to have donated heavily and proportionately to high and middle officials of almost all the departments of the district administration -- particularly the DFO, the Forester and the ranger; the Assistant Conservator of forests; the tehsildar, the revenue supervisor of the tehsil and the Revenue Inspector of two panchayats (Padmagiri and Pandaripani); the S.P., D.S.P., C.I., Station Officer in-charge, and the S.I.s. Apart from these political and administrative wings, the sahuksar-landlord camp, particularly of Pandaripani, Birlakhanpur, etc panchayats and some funded "youth organisations", who have been nursing some grudge against the Sangh, have joined his camp. Even among the intellectuals he has bought a sizeable section, including some advocates of the Sangh's legal aid committee (who have been in the timber business), and even two or three members of the journalists' team that had visited the area and dug out valuable information in the struggle area! Add to this scores of goonda forces he had employed from outside.

Such was the network and game plan that was found to be ranged against the struggling adivasi masses of Padmagiri and Pandaripani panchayats since November-December 1995. As has been its wont, apart from trying to browbeat the emboldened adivasis in Padmagiri by branding their struggle illegal and as the handiwork of outside forces, this combine spared no efforts to create deep fissures and frictions between the adivasis of the Gondia tribe and those of the Koya tribe.

Tactical skill and democratic approach put the enemy in a spot

The Sangh leadership, which had been following a democratic revolutionary orientation, step by step but swiftly overcome the difficulties in dealing with various tactical problems of struggle against such a vile and powerful enemy combine, by pursuing the democratic approach of relying on the mood, explicit grievances or aspirations and direct action of the people in different phases. Though the enemy act of arbitrary and criminal felling of the forest trees was essentially striking further at the roots of the adivasis' basic rights over land and forest, the Sangh leadership did not raise the issue as such to start with. Even to prepare the ground to do so, it had to tackle the problem of overcoming the pervasive fear psychosis of the people. Then it had to tackle the problem of exposing different facets of the fraud perpetrated by the enemy so that people could begin to realise the issues at stake and start voicing their grievances or aspirations in relation to them.

The Sangh leadership tackled both these problems simultaneously as well as effectively by, on the one hand, raising the issue of forest protection from the angle of the adivasis' immediate grievance con-

cerning the destruction of their source of subsistence and, on the other hand, by taking to leading from the front the people's militant blockade of the transport of timber by the contractor. Without focussing on the immediate grievance of the affected people and basing on it, without directly leading the people's blockade of the timber transport, the Sangh leadership could neither have broken the fear psychosis of the people nor could it have succeeded in forcing the administration for spot-enquiry that led to the unravelling of the enemy combine's fraud.

And now, having succeeded in making an initial breakthrough on both counts, the Sangh leadership proceeded with the same tactical skill and democratic approach to tackle the tactical issues that followed the exposure of the modus operandi of the enemy camp.

(i) *The issue of selective and secretive allotment of land:* The very fact, of the lands of 22 Gondia peasants of Tulenguda having been recorded as their respective pattas or tenant lands, raised animated questions from the adivasis of all the surrounding villages. In the spot-verification on the 24th, even the adjoining lands that were being cultivated by other adivasi were recorded as reserve forest lands! The adivasis' question was not why those Tulenguda peasants, who settled there only in 1979, were given their lands. Their question was, if the lands could be given to those who settled in 1979, when why not to us who have been there since decades earlier. Besides, the verification of land records revealed lack of any defined policy and exposed glaring contradictions, ambiguities and overlappings. Actually, it is these dubious forest and land policies and anomalous records of the revenue and forest departments that have been used as chief instruments by the officials of various departments to harass the adivasi peasants on the questions of their legal rights over the lands they have been cultivating. Based on these questions and grievances of the adivasis of all those villages, the Sangh leadership has raised the demand that the administration should properly identify and demarcate the government forest lands and the tenant lands in a transparent and consistent way. Though this demand was raised in the immediate context of the enemy combine's manipulation of the records and laws of the government, it has a larger tactical significance of serving as a first step in building adivasis' struggle for securing the right to land security.

(ii) *The issue of possible further destruction of the forest:* The enemy combine's collusive act was not confined to felling the forest trees in Tulenguda. In its scheme of operation, the large scale felling of trees was to extend to several villages of Padmagiri and Pandaripani panchayats. This imminent further destruction of the forest in the entire belt raised immediate questions in the minds of the people as to how to stop further erosion of their source of subsistence. Besides, the fact

that such criminal schemes are being lawfully allowed, started disillusionment and resentment about the government laws and courts. The utter hypocrisy and inconsistencies in the government's forest policies started getting exposed in the eyes of the people. From their own direct experience, they began to see the glaring contradictions. In the name of forest laws, not only has the government snatched away their traditional rights over the forests, but it has been continuously harassing and prosecuting them on every possible pretext -- such as drawing firewood or bamboos for their huts, etc. Moreover, their lands are being snatched away in the name of the government's afforestation programme. On the other hand the same laws, bills, courts and governments allow such destruction by the vested interests! In the earlier struggles against arbitrary plantations, the Sangh, basing on such experiences and perceptions of the people, had successfully forced the administration to concede the people's demand that the proposed afforestation programme in the villages may be carried out only with the concurrence of the people and of their Sangh committee of the concerned village. Similarly, in this struggle, in the face of the proposed arbitrary felling of the forest in other villages, the Sangh, again basing on the expressed resentment and aspirations of the people, raised the demand that all further felling of forest in other villages should be stopped and that if any felling is to take place, the concerned people and the Sangh should be informed forthwith. These demands aim at not only stopping further erosion of the source of the adivasis' subsistence but also have the larger significance of building the struggle to exercise their collective will with regard to forests -- which in a way enables them to exercise their right to control over the forests, at least partially.

(iii) *The issue of contradictions among adivasis:* Creating a conflict and if need be fuelling clashes among the adivasis was an important element in the enemy combine's scheme of things to carry out their loot and dominance. The Tulenguda peasants, besides being under the physical pressure of the contractor, were also tempted with the prospect of legally owning and more profitably cultivating the lands from which the trees were felled. Out of this they were maintaining a distance from and were apprehensive of the Sangh and the people struggling under its leadership. If the struggling people were to take a hostile attitude towards them for having succumbed to the contractor's pressure or if the contractor succeeded in rallying them firmly to his side, in either case it would have led to serious friction or even clashes between the Tulenguda adivasis and the adivasis of adjoining villages. This could have diverted the entire struggle from the real issue and target.

But the Sangh leadership made diligent efforts to avoid such an eventuality. Besides, it took the approach of winning over the Tulenguda adivasis and uniting all adivasis by applying the tactical principle of taking care of sectional interests while fighting for overall interests. Not only did the Sangh leadership allay the apprehensions of those adivasis regarding their lands, it also effectively exposed how they were being crudely cheated by the contractor with regard to the price of the trees he claims to have bought from them. The price paid by the contractor was utterly negligible -- a mere Rs 200-300 per tree whose timber costs anywhere around Rs 25,000 to Rs 50,000. The Sangh leadership exposed the arbitrary and ridiculously low nature of these payments and raised the demand that the contractor should pay all the tenants from whom he claimed to have bought the trees, according to rationally decided and updated government rates. Further, it put the condition that unless he paid the tenants at that rate, the people's blockade would not be lifted! Due to such a principled and democratic tactical approach towards the minority interests the Sangh leadership and the struggling people could win over and unite with them in the common struggle.

That way, the 24th November spot-verification by the senior officials of all concerned departments in itself was an extraordinary event in the experience of the people. It was a morale booster for the struggling masses because it was their organised strength and fighting resolve that could force the administration to do it. The contractor and officials were visibly irked by the exposures it led to, which so very correctly they had anticipated. More significantly, they were tumbled into a tight spot by the demands the Sangh leadership raised, while the struggling people owned these demands and were determined to continue their blockade and struggle until they were conceded by the administration and the contractor. They effectively repulsed another aggressive attempt by the contractor to transport the timber without accepting the demand regarding the payments to the Tulenguda peasants. The Sangh leadership announced a programme of holding a militant mass rally to intensify the struggle over their demands.

Infuriated by this, the enemy combine concentrated its forces to unleash an aggressive political and physical campaign on the 25th and 26th to frighten the people into submission and frustrate the proposed militant rally. The Sub-Collector and Station Officer in-charge, with large contingents of police, tried to intimidate the people with threats of arrests, cases and other dire consequences. The contractor pressed his goonda forces to attack the Sangh activists and destroy the people's camps and threatened to blow up the district Sangh office. The political leaders of the Congress, the BJP and the Janata Dal unleashed a

campaign that the Sangh belongs to the Naxalites and the people are throwing themselves into the fire by following it. They even called a bandh in Padmagiri on 27th November, the day of the proposed rally.

The people, who had realised the merit of their organised strength, were not prepared to be cowed down. They rallied in greater numbers with their traditional weapons. One significant aspect was that even a sizeable section of the Bengali villagers attended the rally. Thus, the more than three thousand-strong rally, giving militant slogans and resolving to continue the struggle till the demands as put forth by the Sangh were met, became an expression of the people's fighting resolve, and a fitting reply to the belligerence and machinations of the enemy camp.

Finally, the enemy camp had to relent. The contractor agreed to pay the Tulenguda peasants the agreed price of the trees as worked out by the Sangh (about Rs 2.5 lakhs). The contractor and the administration agreed to stop further felling of trees and to inform the Sangh beforehand of any such move. And the administration agreed to make a proper identification and demarcation of the forest lands and tenant lands in a transparent and consistent manner at the earliest. Thus the main demands put forth by the Sangh leadership were met through a tripartite agreement between the contractor, the administration and the Sangh.

So the struggle succeeded in achieving a significant success, resulting in partially checking the unhindered and fraudulent exploitation by the contractor and the likes; boosting the morale and self-confidence of the adivasi peasants of the area and that of the Sangh activists as well as of the other democratic activists; and above all in establishing the credentials of the Sangh leadership -- all combining into laying a preparatory ground and providing a reliable precedent in further unleashing and advancing such struggles of the adivasi peasants in the days to follow.

IV. Flouting of the Agreement; the Struggle Advances

However, the enemy combine was not reconciled to the application of such checks on its fraudulent loot and arbitrary power as reflected in the November 28 agreement. The administration did not take any steps to properly identify and demarcate the forest lands and tenant lands in a transparent manner in any of the villages. Till mid-December, the contractor did not pay the Tulenguda peasants the price amount as agreed. Furthermore, he resorted to fresh felling of trees, this time in Rangamatiguda (10-12 kms away from Tulenguda) of Pandaripani panchayat in the second week of December 1995, thus inviting the

extension of the people's struggle and resistance that was started in the cluster of villages of Padmagiri panchayat.

On December 13, when the contractor started the felling of trees in Rangamatiguda, the adivasi villagers opposed it and even resisted it for about two hours. But they were overwhelmed and scared off by one Gargadhar Burda, a Congress ex-chairman and the main henchman of the contractor in the area, and his forces. The adivasi villagers, who had already heard the inspiring stories of the people's struggle led by the courageous and reliable Sangh leadership in Padmagiri in November, went to Padmagiri in search of the Sangh leadership and contacted there one of the cadre of the Sangh. On being informed by the concerned cadre about all this, the Sangh functionaries proceeded to Rangamatiguda and took prompt steps to mobilise the people to obstruct the ongoing felling of the trees there. Thus, led by the Sangh, more than 500 people rallied with their traditional weapons and forcibly stopped the felling on 21st December. Sangh cadre also contacted the Collector and demanded action regarding this. But the Collector did not take any action and later, when questioned by the GASS fact-finding team as to why he did not take any action, replied that he wanted the people to unite more and intensify the struggle further! The people at Rangamatiguda set up a vigilance camp there to check any further attempts of the contractor to fell the trees there.

The contractor still did not relent. When frustrated at Rangamatiguda, he took his labour from there on 22nd December to Tulenguda again and made fresh fellings there. The people, this time with the full involvement of the Tulenguda peasants (who complained that the contractor had not paid them yet) opposed the contractor there too. But the contractor, either by playing hide and seek with the people or by overwhelming them wherever possible, continued his attempts at fresh fellings in violation of the agreement. This tussle between the struggling masses and the contractor continued for weeks in December 1995 and January 1996.

In December 1995, the Sangh leadership, with the cooperation of other democratic forces, stepped up its efforts to mobilise wider support to the ongoing people's struggle. Already, having sent its important cadre to Tulenguda in November 1995 to help the Padmagiri people's struggle, the Adivasi Sangh in the adjoining Koraput district intensified its support to the ongoing struggle. The democratic personages, the worker-leaders and the Dalito Adivasi Chasi O Mulia Sangh in Navarangpur district (200 kms away from Malkangiri) not only took steps to mobilise support from there, but also started to directly help the struggle by sending activists to the struggle area. A report on this adivasi peasant struggle was prepared and circulated in Oriya. A public

interest litigation petition too was sent to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India. The Ganatantrik Adhikar Suraksha Sangathan of Orissa and the Jungle Suraksha Sangharsh Samiti of Malkangiri made attempts to widely publicise the struggle and also held a joint press conference in the state capital in the first week of January 1996. The GASS also instituted a five member fact finding team to make an objective enquiry and inform the public about the events and the struggle going on in Malkangiri. The fact finding team visited the district on its mission in the second week of January 1996.

A significant advance

Meanwhile, taking inspiration from the first phase of the struggle and the resistance led by the leading-struggle-force (constituted by the district committee of the Sangh then), the struggling masses have made important and swift advances, in the course of participation in the continued and extended phase of this struggle. These advances pertained to the quick emergence of reliable Sangh cadre; the people's active participation in taking decisions and at times taking initiative on their own; and to the preparedness for exercising their collective will.

From Padmagiri itself, about 6-8 Sangh cadre developed fast and became capable of initiating and leading struggles there even in the absence of district level cadre or leaders.

In Tulenguda-Kanjoli pocket, the adivasis of all villages, including Tulenguda, unitedly opposed the fresh felling and on their own decided in the second week of December to set up and man two or three people's checkpoints at different entry points in Tulenguda and Padmagiri to prevent the lifting of the freshly felled trees by the contractor's forces. These people's checkpoints are still in operation.

In Rangamatiguda-Podarapalli pocket, this development of people's initiative in raising the demands and of the preparedness and democratic assertion was even more swift and firm. In the same second week, the people there discussed with six Koya tenants of Rangamatiguda (as those of Tulenguda) from whom the contractor supposedly bought the trees, and hammered out an agreement with them. The salient collective decisions incorporated in this agreement are: The remaining forest (of 'tenant possession') will be left for the common use of all adivasis of the adjacent villages; at any cost the already felled trees will not be given to the contractor at any price; the villagers will commonly raise funds to compensate the concerned tenants for those already felled trees. The villagers were so firm about this agreement that they fiercely reacted when it appeared to them that their decisions were being sidetracked, when the collector was discussing with the fact finding team and the contractor about the date of payment to be

made by the contractor, at the time of the spot-verification the next day. Besides, they vehemently questioned the Collector and other officials about one particular case where 51 acres were allotted in the records to a single tenant. They firmly demanded that such anomalies should be corrected and all the adivasis should be properly given pattas. This event is particularly significant because it indicates that the struggling masses are taking rapid strides (at least in some places) in the direction of raising their struggle to a higher level, ie, raising their fight from their partial issues relating to their subsistence on to the fight for securing basic rights on land and forest.

V. All Round Repression and Attacks -- People Fight Back

With such intensification of the struggle and continued resistance by the struggling masses under the leadership of the Sangh, the enemy forces had almost become mad with desperate rage. The contractor and his henchmen, who had already made several attempts to attack the people and Sangh activists, turned their ire at the GASS fact finding team members, the Sangh functionaries and the democratic revolutionary mass leaders accompanying the fact finding team. The contractor and his henchmen, particularly Kamaraj Kawasi of the BJP and Gangadhar Burda of the Congress, hounded the FFT members wherever they went (during 13-16 January 1996) to collect information and opinions (from the people, Sangh functionaries, contractor's men and the District Collector and other officials) on the problems involved, the incidents and the struggle -- to Tulenguda, Rangamatiguda, and the Collector's office, etc. At every place and at every juncture they abused and threatened them with warnings that the team members are inciting the adivasis, in retaliation for which they would create riots and file cases against the team members under the Adivasi Atrocities Act (Burda, in front of the Collector, on January 15, in the Collector's office)! The contractor's goondas even attempted a fatal attack on the fact finding team at Padmagiri when it was proceeding from Tulenguda to Rangamatiguda on January 16, 1996. On all these occasions the officials and the police remained passive spectators or even willing accomplices. In spite of repeated demands, they refused to provide any protection either to the team or to the people who were being similarly threatened.

The struggling masses were getting fed up with all this. At Rangamatiguda on January 16, at the time of the spot-verification, the contractor's men crossed all limits. The people, who had gathered in large numbers -- both men and women, armed with their traditional weapons -- were already strongly resenting the attempts to negotiate a settlement with the contractor, and were not prepared to leave the

timber to the contractor. The contractor and Burda, along with their followers, made aggressive forays into the people. Infuriated with this, the people fought back and severely beat up Burda, who, in their eyes, is the key agent of the contractor. The womenfolk gheraoed the Collector, protesting against the lack of any protection from the contractor and his men. The fury of the people was so severe that all the officials literally ran away from the scene in whatever possible way. The SP of police, knowing where his loyalties should be, took the contractor and his accomplice -- the DFO -- under his protection and fled away, leaving the Collector to his fate. It was the team members and the democratic revolutionary mass leaders who pacified the people and saved Burda and the Collector.

While returning from there, Burda's gang attacked the team at Pandaripani and beat up the Sangh cadre who came to their rescue. The police, on its part, took the team and the democratic revolutionary mass leaders into custody (in the name of providing protection), kept all of them in the police station throughout the night, detained democratic revolutionary mass leaders who were assisting the Sangh and the other members of the fact finding team were externed from the district in the early hours of January. The arrested leaders were later booked under various sections of the I.P.C. and the Seventh Criminal Amendment Act 3B of the S.C./S.T. Atrocities Act!

Simultaneously, police camps were set up in all important centres. A heavy concentration of police force was moved into the area. And no action whatsoever was taken against the contractor and his men. Thus, they were allowed to do whatever they liked. With this the contractor-politician-administration combine expected to subjugate the people and re-establish their domination in the area. But they were mistaken.

On the 17th early morning the police arrested 12 peasants of Kanjoli, Udupa, Padmagiri, etc., villages and locked them up in their camp at the panchayat office. The people neither knew about the arrest of the leaders the previous night, nor could they know why their men were arrested. They were angry. Under the leadership of the Sangh cadre there, thousands of people got mobilised with their traditional weapons and Singhas. They encircled the police camp at the Padmagiri panchayat office blowing *singhas* at which the police got scared, because it is a traditional war cry of the Koyas. The people then got hold of 10-11 policemen, including the sub-inspector of police, and without doing any physical harm to them, locked them up in another room of the panchayat office, declaring, "you have arrested our people and we are arresting you". They later blocked the Padmagiri-Malkangiri link road. The Collector and the S.P. of police arrived with three vanfuls of

police force, but dared not come to the *singha*-blowing Koya people. From a distance the Collector walked to them with folded hands and talked to them in a conciliatory tone saying that he will get the peasants released at the earliest and the people should let out the police immediately because it is unlawful. The straight reply of the people was: "We don't know about the law; first you release our people and then we will release your police". Finally, the people won and were happy at their own refund boldness.

Later, on the 18th, they retaliated when the contractor's '*dalals*' threw boiling oil at them in Padmagiri bazaar.

On the 19th the contractor approached the Tulenguda peasants, and gave them their respective passbooks, saying that he had deposited Rs 2.60 lakhs in their names in the bank, which was the price of the earlier felled trees as well as the newly-felled trees. Later, on January 20th-21st, he brought 7 trucks and loaded them with the timber at the site, expecting that there would be no problem now. But, according to a collective decision, about 500 people, including those of Tulenguda, encircled the trucks with their traditional arms, pooled dry wood around the tyres of the trucks and warned the contractor that unless the trucks were unloaded and taken away immediately, they would burn them up. The shocked contractor immediately agreed and left the place with the empty trucks.

On the 22nd and 23rd, these people gathered at the Sangh office, and after discussing with the available Sangh cadre, made a route march in batches of 50s, covering the entire 50-60 km route from Tarlakota Sangh office-Birlakhanpur-Pandaripani-Rangamatiguda and finally to Tulenguda, in a show of strength and resolve to fight back, on January 24th-25th, 1996.

The contractor returned again with the trucks, but this time acted through the Collector. The Collector approached the Sangh office and requested the Sangh cadre to agree to a settlement with the contractor, on the plea that the contractor is threatening to blow up the collectorate. The main Sangh functionaries did not go and sent the second rank cadre, who went and declared that they will not even entertain any such proposal, at least until the arrested leaders are released and the full Sangh executive discusses and decides on all matters.

All the while, every day scores of adivasis from all corners of the district were visiting the arrested leaders at the Malkangiri Jail, with flowers, fruits, or whatever they could afford, and were asking how many people would be required to break the Jail and get them released. The arrested leaders had a hard time, patiently convincing them not to resort to any such action.

On January 27th and 28th, Gangadhar Burda along with the contractor and his accomplices organised two meetings, one at Pandripani and another at Padmagiri, where politicians of all hues spoke against the Sangh, promised to finish the leadership physically and asked the contractor to remove the logs with all his goonda forces and their blessings. Gangadhar Jhola, an ex-advisor and ex-president of the Sangh also took initiative for these meetings. The sitting M.L.A. of Malkangiri Aurobindo Dhali spoke in the meetings. Gangadhar Madhi also sent his blessings. After much pursuing of the people and making of all vehicular arrangements, they were only able to mobilise 30 to 40 persons at each meeting.

On January 28th-29th, the contractor made a final attempt with his full force -- all the staff, all the goonda gangs from outside and the labour he could muster -- to Tulenguda. He overpowered the 20-30 people present there at the time and who tried to resist him. He took three resisting Sangh cadre as his captives and camped adjacent to Tulenguda, contemplating further action. About 10 truckloads of timber were transported. The word sped fast to all the nearby villages and to the Sangh office. Starting from the 29th night and by 30th-noon, about 2500 people rallied with their traditional weapons, under the leadership of some important Sangh cadres, to the site where the contractor was camping with about 50 armed goondas and 150 labour along with the three captive cadres. The Sangh cadre and people demanded the immediate release of their cadre held hostage by the contractor. After a verbal duel for some time, some of the contractor's men started coming forward, keeping one of the captive cadre in front of them as a shield and forcing him to negotiate with the Sangh cadre. As they reached nearer the people, the captive cadre broke free from the contractor's men with a flashing jerk and joined the people, who were beginning to take positions. The contractor's camp got unnerved at this sudden development. To incite his own men into attack, the contractor with a few of his hardcore dashed into the people. Left with no alternative, the Sangh cadre too got into action and the people started shooting arrows from their bows. The contractor's camp was shattered. The contractor, who was wearing a protective under his outer garments, managed to flee unhurt, but was still scared for his life. His forces fled in the jeeps, carrying 6 of their arrow-injured colleagues and two remaining captive cadre with them. The people's anger still high, they caught hold of 4-5 of the contractor's men and marched them deep into the jungle in another panchayat. In the night itself, they released three men, who were labourers, and kept the remaining two in custody, but well-treated. The word spread that unless the captive cadre and the jailed leaders were released the

contractor's men would not be released. There were frantic efforts by the Collector, who made daily rounds to the Sangh President and pleaded for the safety of the contractor's men. The Sangh President, who was bed-ridden, told him that he did not know anything of the action, but that as he knew well the Sangh cadre forces, he was sure that those held by the Sangh would be safe and well. At the same time, he asserted with the Collector that the entire responsibility for whatever has been happening for the last two months lay with the Collector and demanded immediate release of the arrested leaders.

Finally, after rejecting bail for the arrested leaders twice and subjecting them to humiliating handcuffs and public parade, they were released on bail by the Jeypore district judge on February 2nd. As a last ditch effort, the contractor tried to kidnap them at the jail gate, but failed because of the swift action and protection of democratic forces around.

Meanwhile, at Tulenguda and Rangamatiguda, the people who were only blocking the transport of the timber till now finally decided to seize the timber and dispersed it to different places in the forest.

Thus all the efforts and attacks by the enemy combine have been frustrated by the fighting masses. At least for the time being, the enemy is stranded in his tracks while the people and the Sangh cadre are continuing with their vigilance and fighting preparedness. During the entire period of the enemy's all-round attack, while the democratic revolutionary mass leaders were in jail and the main Sangh functionaries and cadre went underground, the awakened people and the Sangh cadre dealt with the enemy, mostly on their own initiative, organisational skills and fighting capabilities. They thus fully justified the conviction the Sangh leadership had in their inherent democratic urges and fighting potential. The Sangh leadership is proceeding with the task ahead to consolidate the gains of this still ongoing Landmark Peasant Struggle and lead the entire peasant movement in the district to the next higher level. In this endeavour, the struggling peasant masses of the Malkangiri district and their Sangh leadership rightfully deserve all possible fraternal cooperation and help from the democratic revolutionary forces and the struggling masses throughout the country.

March 1996.

Postscript

The democratic revolutionary mass leaders were released on February 2, and the executive body of the Malkangiri Zilla Adibasi Sangh met on February 10. It took certain decisions, among them: 1: The Sangh members will not surrender themselves to the police; let the police come, we'll oppose. (In connection with the ongoing struggle there

are 40 to 50 cases and warrants issued against around 500 persons.) Important comrades will avoid arrest. 2. The struggle areas should be extended by wider mobilisation. 3. There will be a social boycott of those who opposed the struggle and aligned with the enemy. 4. Volunteer bahinis will be raised for defence of the struggle and villages, upholding the right to carry arms in self-defence. 5. The message of the struggle will also be carried to other nearby districts. 6. While mainly relying on the struggle, public interest litigation will also be filed in the High Court and the Supreme Court.

The Sangh leadership undertook an extensive tour with the message of the struggle in March-April. Five panchayats became directly associated with the struggle, and others also became involved. On April 11 a rally of 6,000 was held in Moupodar, conducted by the Sangh General Secretary. As a result of the struggle not only the timber smuggling but even the smuggling of precious stones from the district has been badly hit.

— June 1996.

Punjab

A mammoth memorial conference for the martyrs of the Naxalbari movement

(The following report is regarding an event of two years ago. Nevertheless, it retains its relevance, in that it provides further evidence of the accentuated receptiveness of the masses to bold projection of the revolutionary political alternative. Hence we are placing it before our readers.)

A vast gathering of about 10,000 people! People from all parts of Punjab and from all walks of life! An inspired mood and serious and solemn atmosphere. Such was the conference to commemorate the Naxalbari martyrs, the biggest ever since the advent of the Naxalbari movement in Punjab, about 25 years ago.

A section of people was surprised to know that such a great number of followers of the Naxalbari movement still exist in Punjab, as large sections of people were made to believe by the ruling classes that the Naxalbari movement had been crushed by liquidating most of the armed squads belonging to CPI(ML) by the police. For this section of the people the Naxalbari movement was synonymous with armed squads and armed actions of communist revolutionaries. This conference was a happy surprise for the people who came to know for the first time about such a correct, militant and genuine political movement, known as the Naxalbari movement. And communist revolutionary activists and their supporters were themselves surprised to realise that getting together they made up such a big force and are capable of gathering such a big mass of people around the programme and path of communist revolutionaries.

The conference was organised by the Committee for the Commemoration of Naxalbari Martyrs, Punjab, at the village Rajeana (district Faridkot) on November 12, 1994. This village was selected as the venue of the conference as it is proud of having sacrificed one of its

sons, Bant Singh Rajeana, for the communist revolutionary movement in the early 1970s. Bant Singh was a young revolutionary, a very good all-round player, soft-spoken and with a charming personality. People of this village could not forget the dreadful scene of a gruesomely mutilated dead body, with its nails pulled out with pincers. The dead body was that of Bant Singh Rajeana, handed over by the police to his parents after killing him in a fake encounter in the early 1970s. People of this village had been cherishing his memory deep in their hearts for so many years and they were keen to commemorate their beloved martyr on a big scale.

Platform for the conference

The commemorating committee kept two considerations in mind while drafting the platform for the conference. As this conference was supposed to communicate the content of the martyrs' mission to the common people, the content of this platform should be such as could be easily understood by them, particularly by workers and peasants. As this platform is supposed to draw a line of demarcation between real and fake followers of the Naxalbari path, the basic demarcating points should be presented in such a manner that the common people could easily recognise the real as well as the fake communist revolutionaries. This was the first consideration.

The second consideration was that the platform should be drawn in such a manner that the maximum of revolutionary forces and elements could be gathered around it, ie, no such point or issue (non-basic) should be inserted in the platform as was, or could be, a controversial one among revolutionaries. This platform was supposed to be a minimum common programme of all communist revolutionaries of Punjab for commemorating the martyrs of Naxalbari movement. This platform was to be limited to highlighting the heritage and path of Naxalbari in general and it was out of its frame to analyse or pass judgement on the role of any communist group or organisation.

As for the criterion of the membership of the commemorating committee, it was decided that nobody should be taken in the committee who violates in any form the spirit (in theory or in practice) of the basics of the Naxalbari movement, as drafted in a letter circulated by the committee for information to all communist revolutionary groups and revolutionary papers. As this was a mass political platform, so individuals, or representatives of mass revolutionary democratic platforms and revolutionary papers were entitled to join the committee provided they agree with the political frame of the platform in letter and spirit. Membership of the committee was not allowed on the basis of representation of communist revolutionary groups or parties. Though

petty bourgeois revolutionaries were not allowed in the committee, they were urged to support the conference, because the politics of Naxalbari defends the revolutionary interests of the petty bourgeoisie. So an appeal was made to all the revolutionaries of Punjab to come forward and jointly commemorate the Naxalbari martyrs.

There was another problem for the commemorating committee. There are certain groups in the communist revolutionary camp who have been passing through a situation of flux for a long time, sometimes adopting a fundamentally correct proletarian line and sometimes taking an opportunist position on some basic points of line. So the problem was whether the martyrs belonging to such groups should be taken as the martyrs of the Naxalbari movement or not. It was a difficult, ticklish and sensitive issue. Just because the leadership of such a group takes opportunist positions on some basic questions of line its martyrs of the past period cannot automatically be excluded from the list of communist revolutionary martyrs, and vice-versa. The particular case in point was a group known as Pulla Reddy group in Punjab, a constituent of CPI(ML) Janashakti. Some militant and popular mass leaders belonging to this group got martyred at the hands of Khalistani terrorists. Unanimity on whether the line and leadership of this group should be taken as a correct proletarian one or not was yet to be achieved even by the important constituents of the commemorating committee. So the controversial issue attached to this question was whether or not these martyrs should be taken as communist revolutionary martyrs of the Naxalbari movement or we should refer to them as the martyrs of the movement against communalism and Khalistani terrorism. After a thorough discussion it was decided by the committee that it should not make itself a party to the controversy as to whether a certain section of martyrs (who are generally revered as communist revolutionary martyrs in a section of the people) were proletarian revolutionaries or not, as it was not necessary and relevant for the committee to take a stand on such an issue. So it was decided that while paying tributes from the stage of the conference we should not say or do anything which may imply (directly or indirectly) that we are discriminating against a certain section of martyrs. For example, except for certain prominent and non-controversial martyrs of the movement, we should not project the names and photographs of some martyrs while leaving aside some others. Instead we should pay tributes in general to all the martyrs of the Naxalbari movement.

Communist revolutionaries belonging to C.T., CPI(ML) and CCRI (two organisations which later joined the CPRCI-ML) responded to this appeal positively and very actively. In fact, credit for the grand success of this conference goes to these communist revolutionary

forces. The response of communist revolutionary forces belonging to CPI(ML)-Party Unity and RCCI(ML), a local communist organisation, was conditional. Representatives of the former took the stand that CPI(ML)-Janashakti should be considered as a genuine communist revolutionary organisation and its Punjab unit should be invited to join the commemorating committee, otherwise they would not participate in the conference. The representatives of RCCI(ML) were of the view that in order to draw a sharp line of demarcation between genuine and fake communist revolutionaries the commemorating committee should take a stand on each and every important issue on which controversy is going on in the communist revolutionary camp. The committee should make its understanding clear on issues such as the formation of CPI(ML) in 1970, the role of com. Charu Majumdar, how the slogan of land to the tiller would be implemented in Punjab, Three World Theory, questions of Soviet Union and China, etc, etc. The liberal approach of the Party Unity comrades and the left sectarian thinking of RCCI(ML) comrades came into sharp conflict with the frame set by the commemorating committee. So these communist revolutionary forces refused to participate in the conference.

Another question thought over by the committee was whether the speakers belonging to these groups, who refused to participate in this joint venture of communist revolutionaries of Punjab, should be allowed to address the conference or not. In Punjab there are groups who would not move their little finger in the mobilisation campaigns for such mass-political functions but who are very active and particular to send their speakers for availing an opportunity of projecting their name and politics among the vast gatherings of people got together by the efforts of others. They would name such opportunist acts of theirs as 'token participation'. It was decided by the committee that speakers belonging to all these groups who make as little effort as possible to make the conference a success should be given a small limited time. But every speaker will have to obey the political-ideological discipline of the frame of the platform of this conference.

Mobilisation of mobilisers

Small group meetings of those revolutionary activists were organised who were ready to plunge themselves into the mobilisation campaign. They invoked the death-defying spirit of communist revolutionary martyrs to exert themselves to the utmost in the mobilisation campaign and to confront boldly each and every problem coming in the way. They invoked the spirit to rededicate themselves to the revolutionary movement and revolutionary cause. By remembering how the ferocity and might of the enemy could not dampen the spirit of sacrifice of

our heroic martyrs, they deepened their realisation that revolutionary fighting spirit and revolutionary will should not depend on the balance of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces at any given time, but instead should emanate from how noble, just and inevitable our cause is.

They discussed the ways and methods of making the propaganda of politics and ideology of the Naxalbari movement relevant, concrete and easy-to-understand for the workers and peasants. They discussed how from the propaganda during the mobilisation campaign each section of the people could get a glimpse of the path of their liberation as well as the liberation of the whole country.

Cyclostyled copies were produced of supporting material for propaganda and were distributed among activists of the mobilisation campaign. A poster, a leaflet and a list of slogans about the Naxalbari movement were issued for the people. In order to integrate the local sentiments of the people of Rajeana village and surrounding villages for their beloved revolutionary martyr Bant Singh Rajeana with the campaign of commemoration of all martyrs of the Naxalbari movement, a local poster highlighting the martyrdom of Bant Singh Rajeana was published in the local area.

Differentiated propaganda for different sections

As the propaganda about the politics of the Naxalbari movement was to be linked to the basic interests and current problems of various sections of the population and their respective mass movements, so each section was approached from a different and specific angle.

While addressing the *organised sections of workers and employees* they were told that the message of Naxalbari was to get rid of and fight against narrow sectional interests, legalism and economism; to integrate workers' and employees' mass movements with the revolutionary democratic movement and to help the peasantry get organised and imbued with agrarian revolutionary politics. The story was told of how the tea plantation workers and peasants of Naxalbari area fought shoulder-to-shoulder against common enemies. Due to a vilification campaign by the enemies and due to the immaturity of a section of armed squads of CPI(ML) giving leeway to such a campaign, the Naxalbari movement of the early seventies caused a scare even among some sections of the people in some places in Punjab. But Naxalbari is not reason for fear; rather it is the only path to liberation for the workers, the peasants, the students, employees and all other patriotic and revolutionary democratic forces -- this was made an important issue of the propaganda campaign.

In *landless labourers'* colonies it was highlighted that:

-- Naxalbari is the name for confiscation of the land, property and implements of landlords and their distribution among the landless labourers and poor peasants.

-- Naxalbari is the name for bringing feudal exploitation and repression, bonded labour and usury to an end. It is a symbol of a struggle for living with self-respect instead of living a wretched life.

-- Naxalbari is the name for raising a banner of struggle for fair wages and higher living standards.

-- Naxalbari is the name for fighting to the finish for seizure of political power and for becoming masters of our destiny.

Among the *landed peasantry*, who bore the brunt of the armed squads of Khalistani terrorists, it was propagated that:

-- Naxalite martyrs were dead against such crimes as torture, robberies, kidnappings, rapes and murders, which were perpetrated by the armed squads of Khalistani terrorists against the people. They lived for the people and they died for the people.

-- They were bent on bringing to an end the present social and political system which supports the monopoly of land by landlords and exploitation of peasants in the form of land rent and usury.

-- They were the fighters for putting an end to the exploitation of the peasantry in the form of adverse terms of trade between agricultural inputs and agricultural commodities. For this they were bent on confiscating the capital and property in India of all the imperialists and their Indian compradors, who are responsible for regularly jacking up the prices of fertilisers and agro-machinery, etc.

Focus of mobilisation

It was decided that the village Rajeana proper and the surrounding villages should be made the focus of the mass mobilisation. But there was a big problem in the mobilisation of Rajeana village. Though the people of the village deeply revered the revolutionary martyr Bant Singh, no communist revolutionary organisation or revolutionary mass political organisation had a minimum foothold in the village. So the activists of the commemorating committee had to start their work from scratch there, ie from one or two stray links.

At first, the ruling class section of the village did not take serious notice of the entry of a team of activists in the village. Leaders of this section even casually supported the proposal of making this village the venue of the conference because they did not visualise the possibility of any serious involvement of the village people in this campaign and conference; nor of the possibility of its becoming a conference with

a big draw for the people of other areas of the state. They did not want to earn discredit by opposing the mobilisation campaign and the proposal of the venue of the conference and by thus injuring the sentiments of the village people for their martyr, Bant Singh. But as the campaign in the village began to take a serious shape, as the various sections of the village people began to show curiosity for the mission for which a young revolutionary had sacrificed his life, ruling class leaders of the village began to rethink about their plank of approval for the conference.

Activists divided themselves into two groups, one for landless labourers' colonies and the other for landed peasantry's parts of the village. At first small group meetings and then bigger mass meetings were organised on both sides of the village. When landless labourers were told concretely what the mission of the Naxalbari martyrs meant for them, for their present and future lives, a glow could be noticed in their eyes. Invariably their response was, "Yes, we will contribute funds for the conference, we will cooperate in the management of the conference, our whole family would attend the conference." Some of them would say, "Do not forget to visit us regularly even after the conference."

Seeing such interest on the part of the village people, particularly the landless labourers, in revolutionary politics, and seeing that the Akali Dal (a ruling class party of Punjab) to which the ruling class leaders of the village belong was becoming more and more the target of the hatred of the village people since the Akali Dal government was the murderer of Bant Singh Rajeana, these leaders became alarmed. They spread a scare that the police would not allow the conference and that these people of the village are certain to be arrested and beaten by the police for harbouring and supporting Naxalbari activists. The effect of this scare campaign on the landless labourers was negligible but the response of the peasantry became lukewarm.

The next two weeks were of intense political fight within the village. The ruling class section of the village and their few supporters from the people were continuously spreading rumours of impending police attack on the village; and the team of revolutionary activists would strain every nerve to counter these rumours and to expose the political motive behind such rumours. In order to eliminate the traces of fear from the village atmosphere, a series of streetcorner plays and corner rallies were organised and the attempt proved to be a successful one. The whole of the village was mobilised upto the day of the conference. About twelve thousand rupees were donated, every practical and material support was given and the overwhelming majority of the village population (of more than 1,000 families) attended the conference.

Along with Rajeana, the mobilisation campaign was organised in the surrounding villages. One important village was Rode, native village of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was the chief villain of the Khalistani movement. This unfortunate village was one of the strongholds of Khalistani terrorism and therefore about 60 persons from the village were killed by both the Khalistani armed squads and the police. When the campaign for the conference reached this village, the people heard the views of the revolutionaries in pin-drop silence. They narrated how they had suffered at the hands of the Khalistani armed gangs. Pointing their accusing finger at the brothers and nephews of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale they told how, by kidnappings and by extracting lakhs of rupees as ransom money, leaders of the Khalistani movement raised bungalows and purchased big properties. While speaking comparatively they remembered with reverence the sacrifices by Naxalbari martyrs, referring to them as "our boys".

Thus the mobilisation campaign conducted in the Rajeana area in the form of small group meetings, big public meetings, rallies and streetcorner plays created a very favourable and responsive atmosphere. Thousands of people of this area (men, women and children) participated in the conference and about Rs. 30,000 from this area was contributed to the fund collection for the conference.

Those were the days when the Congress government led by Chief Minister Beant Singh was acting almost like a naked police regime with K.P.S. Gill, Punjab police chief behaving as a super-Chief Minister. Most of the peaceful state-level rallies and conferences of Akali Dal and Bharatiya Kisan Union were being banned. Sometimes the Chief Minister would issue a curt statement that "I cannot allow such and such conference as the organisers of the conference intend to destroy the hard-earned law and order in the state". And in most cases an undeclared ban was put into effect. Just on the day of the conference police parties used to spring into action throughout the state and by a preventive network of police *nakas*, confiscating the vehicles carrying people to the conferences and by dispersing or arresting (if needed) the participants, such public functions were prevented -- while issuing statements at the same time that there is no ban on such public gatherings.

The commemorating committee deliberated upon the probability of declared or undeclared ban on the conference. It was decided that in case of the banning of the conference we should not cancel the preparations for and towards the venue of the conference. Rather, detachments of participants of the conference should try to rush towards the venue of the conference, and wherever police parties would try to block their march, they should resist and assert their democratic

right to assemble, in the forms suitable to the mood and strength of the detachments. They may start sit-ins and block road traffic at the very spots where police parties blocked their march. They may resist lathi-charges and arrests by the police, if possible. They may organise protest demonstrations in towns and villages nearby the places of police blockades. The committee concluded that in case of a ban on the conference such protest and resistance actions in various parts of the state would serve the very purpose of the conference, to an extent.

But the police did not intervene, and about 10,000 people assembled at the conference. The key address was delivered by comrade Amolak Singh, convenor of the Committee for the Commemoration of Naxalbari Martyrs. He communicated the mission of the martyrs in very simple language and in effective style, touching the feelings and thoughts of the people. In the audience, there was a big section of people who were hearing for the first time the authentic version of the representatives of the Naxalbari movement about who the Naxalbari martyrs were, what they wanted to do, ie what was and is the message of the Naxalbari movement. So naturally the people heard the key address in pin-drop silence, punctuated intermittently by revolutionary slogans and loud applause. A short play, "Shaheed", specially written for this occasion, was staged by the noted dramatist of Punjab, Gursharan Singh.

A resolution, "Highlight the sacrifice, heritage and path of the martyrs of the Naxalbari movement" was passed by the conference. The resolutions pinpointed the importance of carrying the heritage, aim and death-defying spirit of sacrifice to the people. Signifying the importance of the Naxalbari uprising for the contemporary Indian polity, particularly for the Indian communist movement, the resolution described the significance and basic points of the politics and ideology of the communist revolutionary movement, popularly known as the Naxalbari movement, sharply demarcating it from right revisionist communist organisations, ie CPI and CPI(M). Finally, the resolution clarified what is the meaning of highlighting the heritage and path of Naxalbari in the present day context. According to the resolution it means:

- To draw a clear-cut line of demarcation from the class collaborationist parliamentary path. To make the people conscious and cautious about the attempts, in any form, to present the parliamentary path as a path of people's liberation and to expand illusions about it among the people.
- To give a call for people's democratic revolution.
- To highlight the importance of building the agrarian revolutionary movement and revolutionary united front.

-- To highlight the democratic right of the people to adopt any form of revolutionary mass resistance to resist counter-revolutionary violence.

-- To project the commonness of interests of the Indian people, and the people of other countries, struggling against imperialism and its running dogs; and to express solidarity with revolutionary movements of the whole world, particularly with the people's armed revolutionary movement in Peru.

-- Basing on the experience of the recent period of Punjab, the significance of organisational and mental preparedness of people for self-defence against counter-revolutionary violence should be projected.

-- Commemorating the great martyrs of the Naxalbari movement, the urge and necessity of unity of the scattered communist revolutionary movement into a single communist revolutionary organisation should be forcefully expressed.

While dispersing, comments of people returning from the conference were full of satisfaction, joy and inspiration. Someone was heard saying, "We had been mistaking Naxalbari people as a terror, only now we know the reality. They are very much for our welfare." Such comments were made by many people, landless labourers, peasants. There were families of revolutionary activists who used to oppose their taking part in the revolutionary movement, thinking that in this movement full of risks and hardship, these activists have not considerable people's support and they are isolated. But after attending the conference, members of these families were having second thoughts about their resistance to the revolutionary activity of their husbands/sons, etc. Some of such family members were commenting about the revolutionary movement and revolutionary activities, "This is a good work, here everyone is with them, we had been anxious for a long time meaninglessly". A leader of a group of 8-10 migrant labourers from Bihar was heard saying, "We had been observing for a full nine years, whether anyone exists (ie communist revolutionaries) in Punjab or not, only today we knew the fact that they are very much here. Had we known of their presence earlier we would have brought doomsday in our factories."

In landless colonies of Rajeana, respect and affection for the revolutionary activists and enthusiasm was brimming over. The words of a landless woman labourer represented the mood in the colonies. Using a Punjabi proverb, she said "One should give assurance of only one's own mind, neither of one's son nor of one's daughter. I shall dedicate my remaining life to this party. This is my line engraved on a stone! I do not bother about whether anyone else comes (to the party) or not."

"Lok Morcha Punjab" Takes Off

-- by a correspondent

In March 1996, the democratic revolutionary forces of Punjab took a politically significant initiative. Responding to the long overdue demand of the objective political situation prevailing in India, a democratic revolutionary mass political platform, viz, "Lok Morcha Punjab" was formed and duly launched from village Selbrah of district Bathinda. Selbrah is the native village of revered martyr Jagpal Singh, who fell victim to the bullets of Khalistani terrorists in a gruesome massacre in April 1991.

As the statement by the preparatory committee of Lok Morcha clearly brings out, the emergence of Lok Morcha Punjab is to be seen as a response, howsoever modest, of the democratic revolutionary forces of Punjab to the ever-accentuating -- already acute and insoluble -- overall crisis of the reactionary ruling classes of India. The present ruling class regime, its various parliamentary parties and institutions stand thoroughly exposed and discredited in the eyes of the people of India. The people of India are thoroughly disgusted with the present rule and long for an alternative. The tremendous response being given to the struggles and movements which seem to clash with or pose a serious challenge to the present rule and the growing popularity of platforms having a distinct identity and demarcation from the traditional parliamentary parties or platforms is a clear manifestation of this mood of the people. Likewise, the response of the people to the vague slogans of Khalistan, Ram-rajya, or Dalit raj, being raised by various ruling class sections, is yet another but glaring, though negative, manifestation of the people's longing for an alternative. The emergence of Lok Morcha Punjab is an attempt on the part of democratic revolutionary forces to intervene in such a political situation from a people's democratic revolutionary angle and perspective and provide and project a revolutionary alternative to the present discredited and rotten set-up.

Broad objectives

The political programme and objectives of the Lok Morcha Punjab are delineated in an elaborate form in its manifesto. However, in a preamble to its constitution, a concise version of its objectives is stated as follows:

"The Lok Morcha will wage struggle for the political objective of attaining real independence by putting an end to the present state of fake independence and disguised bondage. Real independence will put the destiny of the nation in its own hands. The nation will decide on its own what is good or bad without any interference from alien forces. Much unlike the present day ruling class renegades, it will not dance to the tune of foreign imperialists. For achieving this political objective, the Lok Morcha will wage relentless struggle against imperialist forces as well as against internal pro-imperialist and anti-national anti-people forces.

"The Lok Morcha will wage struggle against the present autocratic regime, for democratisation in all walks of life and for establishing a genuine democracy, ie a people's democracy. For achieving this objective, it will wage a relentless struggle against all autocratic forces opposed to democracy.

"The Lok Morcha will wage struggle for the twin objectives of putting an end to the domination of the foreign imperialist powers and their local accomplice -- the big bourgeoisie -- over the Indian economy and the dominance of landlords over agriculture so as to abolish socio-economic backwardness of the country and to pave the way for self-sustained growth and prosperity.

"To achieve these above objectives, the Lok Morcha, in order to educate and organise the masses of people, will organise campaigns to propagate its politics and policies. It will strive to build a broad people's revolutionary struggle-movement over the common basic demands as well as other important demands of all the sections of the people. Apart from this, it will strive to lead and lend support, in a suitable manner, to various sections of the people struggling for realising their demands."

Not only are the politics and policies of the Lok Morcha Punjab in sharp contrast to the politics and policies of ruling class parties but its methods of propaganda, organisation and activity represent also a clean rupture with the ruling class parties' methods of work:

"The Lok Morcha Punjab shall utilise such forms of propaganda, organisation and struggle as ensure the representation of the will of broad sections of the people, result in their active participation in propaganda, organisation and struggle activities and enhance their capabilities of self-organisation and leadership.

"Unlike the vote-seeking parties which have an insatiable craving for votes, the Lok Morcha Punjab rejects all forms of activity which encourage sycophancy, hobnobbing or collusion with the ruling class parties, the bureaucracy or anti-social elements."

So, from the above quotes from the Lok Morcha preamble, it can be easily averred that Lok Morcha is a precursor to the revolutionary united front based on the class alliance of working class, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie directed against the alliance of imperialism, feudalism, and comprador-bureaucratic bourgeoisie. It is this orientation and perspective with which the Lok Morcha Punjab will steer its future activities. It is no doubt a platform of people's propaganda, agitation and struggle. Nevertheless, due to subjective constraints, propaganda and agitational activities may predominate for the time being in its initial stage of work.

The founding convention

Earlier, in October 1995, a four-member preparatory committee was set up to propagate the objective need of forging such a mass-political platform and the broad contours of its political objectives and perspective. The preparatory committee issued and widely circulated a four-page leaflet throughout Punjab for this purpose. The committee organised a spate of meetings and discussions in dozens of villages, industrial localities, employees' centres and contacted a number of democratic persons as a part of its preparatory work for laying the ground for a mass political front. Later, this preparatory committee converted itself into a preparatory committee of Lok Morcha Punjab.

In February 1996, the preparatory committee of Lok Morcha Punjab issued its draft manifesto and draft constitution, and circulated them among its supporters for extensive as well as intensive deliberations. The preparatory committee organised explanation-cum-discussion meetings on these drafts throughout Punjab. At places, keen discussion took place on these drafts. The initial response to the Lok Morcha was quite encouraging. These meetings also elected delegates to participate in the founding convention of the Lok Morcha Punjab, which was slated to be held on March 9-10, 1996, at village Selbrah.

Nearly 90 delegates from all over Punjab converged on Selbrah on March 9 to take part in the proceedings of the convention. After elaborate deliberations and discussion, the draft manifesto and draft constitution were unanimously adopted, albeit with suitable amendments. The convention elected a nine-member state organising committee of the Lok Morcha Punjab. The state organising committee further elected two well-known democratic revolutionary mass leaders, N.K. Jeet and Amolak Singh, as, respectively, president and secretary of the Lok

Morcha Punjab. Apart from both having been the leading functionaries of the erstwhile "Front Against Communalism and Repression" and having been on the hit list of Khalistani terrorists, Amolak Singh had been the state president of "Punjab Kisan Union" and "Punjab Lok Sabhiacharak Manch", and has a vast experience of work among the people; N.K. Jeet is the current divisional secretary of P & T Employees' Union and convenor of the "Varg Chetana Manch" -- a forum of democratic revolutionary work among the industrial workers. The newly-chosen state secretary Amolak Singh introduced the state organising committee members to the cheering delegates. Almost all the state organising committee members belonged to struggling sections and have had good experience of mass work.

Apart from adopting various resolutions on different issues, the convention resolved to hold its first-ever public gathering on March 31, too, in Selbrah village, in the form of a Shaheedi Conference to commemorate the martyrdom of people's martyrs -- especially the popular national heroes of the freedom movement, viz. Shaheed Bhagat Singh and his associates, whose martyrdom day falls in the month of March. On the conclusion of the delegate convention, a public rally was organised on March 10 at which the newly elected Morcha leaders reiterated their firm resolve to vigorously carry forward the cause of martyrs till its completion. A local support committee was elected from amongst the village people to help in making arrangements, mobilisation and fund raising for the March 31st conference. The village youth enthusiastically volunteered for undertaking various responsibilities.

Conference preparations begin

Enthused by the successful conclusion of the Morcha convention and the overwhelming response of the supporters of Lok Morcha Punjab and the people at large, the leaders and activists of the Morcha plunged themselves into hectic campaigning for making the 31st March conference yet another resounding success.

To unleash the process of preparations for the state-level conference, the state organising committee issued a large-sized poster -- ten thousand in number -- which called upon the people to reach Selbrah on 31st March to pay homage to the people's martyrs and to rally around the Lok Morcha Punjab fighting for the glorious cause of the people and their martyrs. More than twenty thousand leaflets were also issued to disseminate the message of the Morcha and conference.

During the first phase of preparations, dozens of meetings and gatherings were organised throughout Punjab to rally around the advanced elements of toiling and struggling sections of various classes

and social strata. During these meetings, the plight of the Indian toiling sections, the aggravated imperialist onslaught on the people of India, especially in the wake of the so-called new economic policy and structural adjustment, the total betrayal of the Indian ruling classes and the bankruptcy of ruling class politicians and their policies as well as the parliamentary path were discussed and exposed. The programme and policies of Lok Morcha Punjab were projected in sharp contrast with the bankrupt parliamentary parties' policies and programmes. These meetings and the intensive discussion process paved the way for the organisation of *ad hoc* preparatory committees at lower levels to undertake the preparations for the conference on March 31st.

During the second phase, emphasis was laid on mustering men and material resources for the conference. An extensive fund collection and propaganda drive was launched throughout the state. The thrust of the drive was to enlist, to the maximum possible extent, the support of the agricultural labourers, peasant masses, the industrial workers and other toiling and struggling sections of the masses.

Preparation work in Selbrah faces rough weather

Whereas in other parts of Punjab, the Lok Morcha mobilisation campaign for the March 31st conference went on more or less unimpeded, without any overt political opposition, the Morcha had to contend with stiff opposition, overt as well as covert, in village Selbrah from day one, when the venue of the conference was publicly made known. This opposition came in the form of serious disruptionist activity by certain elements belonging to the village and its surrounding villages. These elements owe allegiance to a communist revolutionary group.

This particular communist revolutionary group has mass work and political connections in and around Selbrah. They perceive this as their political fiefdom where no other communist or democratic revolutionary force has the right to work. Actually, this betrays their lack of confidence in their political line and work.

The selection of Selbrah as the venue of the conference was made due to many positive considerations in its favour. First, it was the village of an erstwhile state-level leader and revered martyr of the "Front Against Repression and Communalism", Jagpal Singh. (The most prominent forces in the Lok Morcha were those who had taken the initiative to form and operate the Front earlier.) There was a long-standing consistent demand of the village people for a state-level gathering to commemorate his memory. Secondly, Selbrah lay almost central to the main area of influence of the Lok Morcha Punjab. Thirdly, it is a pocket of peasant work. A state-level huge gathering

would certainly influence the peasant work positively. There were other considerations, such as local participation, fund resources, etc, favouring the village.

Keeping these considerations in mind, when the prominent men of the village were consulted about the proposal, they were agog with joy, and enthusiastically supported the proposal, assuring their full cooperation.

There seemed certain problems and handicaps, too. One glaring handicap was the lack of committed and dedicated activists of the Lok Morcha in the village who could provide the local leadership and function as a rallying centre. Then, the presence of the activists of another political group could create problems if their attitude was not positive and cooperative. Past experience with this group was not encouraging. A year or so earlier, they had opposed a similar local-level shaheedi conference on a flimsy pretext. They had walked out of a meeting opposing the selection of village Selbrah as a venue, openly opposed the programme and created problems. But when the programme turned out to be a grand success, they unabashedly rammed into it and created a scene about getting time to speak. When their representative was given time under certain conditions, he flagrantly violated them. The irresponsible behaviour and disruptionist role was highly resented by the village people. Later the activists of this group had to admit their mistake. It was expected that good sense would prevail this time and they would not repeat their old mistake. The Lok Morcha activists approached these comrades at the outset to obtain their cooperation in the programme, and cleared their doubts and apprehensions as to the choice of place.

As it turned out, such cooperation was not to be. While superficially reconciling themselves to the programme, these comrades engaged in door-to-door smear campaigns against the Morcha, charging it (baselessly) with leaving them out of the committee, with disrupting their meetings, and with using without permission the name of a local peasant martyr (as if they were the sole claimants to his legacy), etc. They even suddenly floated a new organisation, Lok Sangram Morcha, which they admitted was a counter-measure to the Lok Morcha. Under this banner they collected money on their own receipts in the name of the March 31st conference, misleading the villagers. When this was discovered, they refused to turn over the collected funds to the village elders or to the Lok Morcha. The villagers resented this attitude, and made fresh donations to the Lok Morcha itself.

Finally, they tried by public pronouncements and door-to-door campaigning to press the Selbrah people to assemble on the 31st at another venue. On the day of the conference, they tried to detain the

incoming Lok Morcha supporters at this second venue by misleading them. In this fashion they managed to gather less than two hundred persons. They tried to tag Lok Sangram Morcha stickers on the ordinary rural women, misleading them that these were for their identification at the time of dispersal, lest they get lost in the crowd and miss their vehicle. Contrary to the promise they made to the village activists and neutral sections that they would not take their banners inside the pandal, they entered the pandal raising their own slogans and waving their own banners and hoardings. The Lok Morcha leaders chose to ignore it politely. These elements described their activity as "solidarity"(!).

Throughout the process of this disruptive activity, the Lok Morcha activists kept their cool. They approached these elements for mutual discussions to avoid such disputes, but the disruptionists were adamant. The Lok Morcha activists watched their moves closely, took quick notice of their smear campaigns, kept utmost restraint and refused to be drawn into open controversy or clash with them. They concentrated their attention on the advanced layer of villagers which was not aligned with any political group or party. They refuted the disruptionists' propaganda with sound reasoning, carefully chose to listen to the advanced layer, valued their judgement and suggestions, and avoided imposing anything on them. In this process, the entire advanced layer was won over. Then this layer proved quite beneficial. They flung themselves into activity, shattering the misleading propaganda and countering the disruption. They succeeded in winning over all the activists of the disruptionists barring a few die-hard elements, and completely isolated them in the village, forcing them to go on the defensive. The mature and democratic approach of the Lok Morcha representatives resulted in creating a team of firm supporters and activists for the conference as well as future activity. The disruptionists were utterly frustrated.

The preparation goes on

The campaign for mobilising the people and raising funds picked up momentum in the third week of March. A gathering of nearly 70 Morcha supporters and activists took place on March 16 at Bathinda. The gathering set up a campaign committee to coordinate and conduct the day-to-day activity. A leaflet highlighting the main points of the Lok Morcha manifesto, particularly the alternative it projected, was published. "Varg Chetna Manch" -- an associate of Lok Morcha Punjab -- published a leaflet for the spinning mill workers of Bathinda, exhorting them to participate in the Shaheedi Conference. Many meetings of the workers were also held. A "jhanda march" was also organised

on March 29 in the industrial area. Similar campaign committees were also set up at several other places. Meetings were organised at innumerable places. Street plays were organised at a few places in Doab region to disseminate the message of the Morcha conference.

Despite its continued preoccupation with fighting disruption, the support committee at village Selbrah published a multi-coloured poster and a leaflet to propagate the message of the conference. A jeep-load of village-level Morcha supporters spread the message of the conference in the neighbouring villages. Meetings were organised in a number of villages. Video-cassettes of revolutionary plays were played in half-a-dozen villages and an activist of the Morcha addressed the assembled people calling upon them to attend the Lok Morcha conference on March 31.

The Lok Morcha activists set targets of fund-raising and mobilisation of men for the conference. Although it was not an ordinary conference or a mobilisation campaign on routine issues of various sections, it was a mobilisation calling upon people to unite over their common basic demands and a revolutionary programme of emancipation of the people, yet the response was highly encouraging. The disillusionment of the people with the traditional parliamentary parties was so strong and the response to the Morcha programme and conference so overwhelming that the seemingly high targets were scaled within a few days of the campaign. New targets were set and surpassed at several places. The fund-collection campaign turned into a mass collection drive in several nearby villages and towns and even in some faraway big cities like Bathinda. Although it was the fag-end of the month, when salaried people are generally short of cash, even then they contributed generously. Hardly anyone refused to contribute. But for the scarcity of time and activists, the collection would have been much more. Many activists of democratic mass organisations lent a helping hand in this drive.

The people of village Selbrah contributed nearly fifteen thousand rupees, despite the fact that the crop had failed for the third consecutive time and four fund-collection drives for various purposes had been organised prior to this in the preceding few months.

Arrangements

A sprawling pandal with a huge covered area of 35,000 sq ft was erected for the conference. An extensive sound system was installed. Separate committees for erection of the stage and pandal, for serving water, preparing tea, serving tea, utensil-cleaning, keeping discipline, security, management, doctors' help, and grievances redressal were set up. A stage committee to assist the stage personnel was also there.

An elaborate security set-up with volunteers armed with fire-arms came into operation a day prior to the conference. The conference venue as well as the main route through the village upto the gate of the pandal were decorated with flags and bunting. The interior of the conference pandal, decorated with banners with the Morcha slogans painted on them, wore a festive look.

The village people, especially the youth, took active part in the arrangements like transporting of pandal and kitchen materials from the town to the village, storage of water, collection of milk, and other sundry jobs. Nearly four quintals of milk for tea was supplied free of cost by the village people of the area. Many Selbrahites participated in fund-collection in a nearby town as well as in pasting posters and mobilising the people for the conference. On the night preceding the conference day, a contingent of nearly fifty youth of the village, on their own, took out an awakening procession ("*Jago*") raising the Morcha slogans and singing a mass song.

The conference

On the day of the conference, the venue of the conference hummed with activity of volunteers running to and fro, giving final touches to the arrangements. At 11 a.m., the participants began to arrive. An unending convoy of vehicles, laden with slogan-shouting participants, kept tracking the dusty lanes of the village. The slogans reverberated through the entire surroundings. People from all walks of life -- women, peasants, agricultural labourers, industrial workers, employees, etc. -- and from all corners of Punjab thronged the conference site. The people of Selbrah village, wonder-struck but relishing the unending stream of participants, locked their homes and participated almost *en masse*. The gathering surpassed all estimates and the organisers of the conference had to remove the side curtains of the pandal.

The vast gathering of nearly twelve thousand people reflected a mix of peasants, rural labour, industrial workers, employees, youth, women, etc. As far as the class composition of the gathering is concerned, it was highly biased in favour of the basic classes, viz. industrial and rural labour and the peasantry. They constituted roughly two-thirds of the total gathering. The women were conspicuous by their presence in large numbers -- one-third to one-fourth of the entire gathering. As far as the organised participation goes, the agricultural labourers and landless peasants belonging to Harijan caste and the worker-cum-employees of the electricity department were by far the biggest groups. The students' presence was thin, which is a matter of grave concern for the Lok Morcha Punjab and calls for their immediate attention.

The proceedings of the conference started formally at 12 o'clock with a thrilling mass action song by the artists of Amritsar Natak Kala Kendra. The gathering joined the chorus *en masse*. The speeches were interspersed with revolutionary songs, action songs, and choreographies depicting the hardships, miseries, sorrows, dreams and aspirations of the toiling masses.

The father of local martyr Jagpal Singh formally released the manifesto of the Lok Morcha Punjab by receiving the first copy of it from Amolak Singh, the secretary of Lok Morcha Punjab, amid thunderous applause. Pointing out the significance of Lok Morcha in his simple rustic style, Shaheed Jagpal's father emphasised the fact that there had always been a struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed from the time of Aurangzeb. The oppressors changed names and forms. He recounted the struggle waged by the "Front Against Repression and Communalism" and the heroic sacrifices made by the fighters. The heirs to these martyrs have now come onto the field, in the changed conditions, under the banner of Lok Morcha to show the people the path to their emancipation. Everybody is duty-bound to participate in the Morcha and strengthen it.

N.K. Jeet, the state president of the Lok Morcha Punjab, highlighted the significance of this conference dedicated to the memory of martyrs. He paid glowing tributes to them. While dwelling upon the sharpened imperialist and ruling class onslaught on the toiling people and exposing the anti-people content of the new economic policy, he explained in detail the context in which the need to form Lok Morcha Punjab arose. Some other state committee members also spoke on the occasion.

The keynote address to the conference was delivered by Amolak Singh, the state secretary of the Morcha. There was a pin-drop silence as the eagerly awaiting audience listened to his each and every word with rapt attention. He explained in detail how the concept of independence and the path to achieve it, as conceived by people's martyrs, was totally at variance with the concept and path of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Jinnah. The martyrs fought for an independence and a society where genuine democracy prevailed, people themselves shaped their destiny, the toilers enjoyed the fruits of their labour, the tillers owned the land, where there was no discrimination based on caste, religion, community or gender, a society free from present oppressors and exploiters. He termed the present fake independence a betrayal to the cause of the national martyrs, a conspiracy hatched by imperialists with the collusion of the post-independence ruling classes.

Exposing the fake parliamentary democracy of India, he said it is in reality a freedom to choose from amongst the poisonous snakes. He characterised the opportunist political parliamentary parties as

watch-dogs of the present exploitative set-up. All are unanimous on policies which further indebted the nation to foreign imperialists.

Projecting an alternative for the emancipation of people of India, he categorically said ballots can never pave the way to people's emancipation. We will have to unite all the forces that can be united to oppose imperialism, feudalism and big bourgeoisie and wage relentless struggle in all possible forms against these sworn enemies of the people. He ridiculed the various bourgeois fronts which masquerade as an alternative to the present regime. He declared amidst loud applause that there were only two fronts. One comprised of those forces which stand for maintaining and defending the status quo and the other one comprising of those forces that want to change this system qualitatively through a people's revolution. Today's conference is a loud proclamation to change this system lock, stock and barrel.

Others who addressed the conference included Gursharan Singh, an eminent dramatist. He said such gatherings inspired him and instilled confidence in him. We are to advance steadfastly on the path shown by martyrs. We should coin popular slogans and advance like a wave. The Lok Morcha has aroused high expectations.

Culminating the conference, the village sarpanch thanked the participants and assured his full cooperation to the Lok Morcha Punjab.

After listening to the speakers for more than two hours with keen attention, it was time to enjoy a famous play "*Itihas de safe te*" ("From the pages of history") highlighting the revolutionary legacy of the freedom movement. The audience sitting in and around the pandal watched spellbound the various scenes -- the plight of the people under colonial rule, the heroic deeds of the Ghadar party revolutionaries, mass revolts, the betrayal of 1947 and the havoc wreaked by communal partition of the country. The climax of the play echoed the Morcha call to the people in these words, "One Ghadar was enacted in 1857, the second Ghadar took place in 1915, the third needs to be made these days". The artists and the gathering alike chanted "rebel! rebel!! rebel!!!" to the musical tunes. With the whole surroundings reverberated with the words "*Ghadar karo*", the day's assembly came to a conclusion. Reiterating their resolve anew, the moved gathering began to disperse in a disciplined way to the actual arena of Ghadar -- the vast masses of the people.



Homage

Comrade Nimmala Krishna Murthy

Comrade Nimmala Krishna Murthy, one of the few surviving flag-bearers of the erstwhile armed peasant revolutionary movement in the Srikakulam agency area of Andhra Pradesh, is no more. He died in the noon of 24th June 1996 in Mundenkhal hospital near his native village -- Valasaballeru. He was the Secretary of the Girijan Sangam and a member of the area committee of the communist revolutionary party organisation -- now the CPRCI(ML) -- of Vizianagaram-Srikakulam districts. At the time of his death, he was engaged in the efforts to rejuvenate the Girijan Sangam and the party organisation in the area, in spite of his deteriorating health. *The Comrade* extends its condolences to the comrades of the area and to his family -- his wife, two daughters and a son. It shares their fighting resolve to carry forward the revolutionary tasks which were so dear to him and performing which he died.

Comrade Krishna Murthy was born in 1931-32, to Nimmala Jogulu and Tellamma, in an interior village of the Agency area. He learnt to read and write from his father, who was the only literate person then in those remote parts. As a youth, he was deeply concerned about the

sufferings of his people who were living under conditions akin to medieval serfdom, and soon came into the fold of the democratic peasant struggles led by the communists. At the age of 25, around 1958, he joined the Girijan Sangam founded by comrade Vempatapu Satyam and Adibhatla Kailasam and became a constant companion to the Sangh cadre in all the activities of the Girija Sangam.

In 1960, Comrade Krishna Murthy became a member of the then Communist Party of India. The discipline and revolutionary commitment with which he used to participate in the party activity were of a high standard. When the first split occurred in the CPI, he took the side of the CPI(M), following the decisions of the Srikakulam district committee against revisionism. Subsequently, as the neo-revisionism of the leadership of the CPI(M) got exposed and the communist revolutionaries broke away from the CPI(M), Comrade Krishna Murthy firmly stood on the side of the communist revolutionaries and participated with greater vigour in the peasant mass revolutionary struggle led by the Srikakulam district committee.

Comrade Krishna Murthy was an active participant in the various struggles led by the Girijan Sangam on issues such as higher salaries for farm servants, abolition of bonded labour, higher wages for agricultural labour, etc. He faced the repression unleashed by the landlords and the State on various occasions with courage and conviction. As the Girijan movement advanced into a militant phase, following the martyrdom of Comrades Koranna and Maganna in the landlords' firing at Levidi on 31st October 1967, Comrade Krishna Murthy soon emerged as a front-line fighter of that movement. After the Srikakulam district committee declared the beginning of armed struggle on 11th November 1968, Comrade Krishna Murthy played an active role in the first people's armed action for the confiscation of the properties of the landlords in Pedagottili. Thus growing along with the movement, he developed into an active cadre with every turn of the movement during 1967-68. As the State repression intensified and the Srikakulam girijan peasant revolutionary movement took the form of an armed struggle, Comrade Krishna Murthy went underground.

By 1968, Comrade Krishna Murthy married Biddika Narsamma in Valasaballeru village and they had a daughter. While he was underground, first his wife and later his daughter succumbed to illness caused by the intense sufferings under economic and physical hardships during the all-round State repression in the area. But neither this personal loss nor the threat to his own life could deter Comrade Krishna Murthy.

As a responsible cadre he played an active role in the Girijan armed peasant revolutionary struggle during 1968-72. During this period, he was a member of the party organisation's Agency Committee. As an in-charge of the medical wing, he tirelessly served the members of the armed squads. He led his squad life as a member of the central squad

formed under the leadership of Comrade Vempatapu Satyam. When this Girijan movement met with severe setbacks and the armed squads got disintegrated, he undauntedly tried to reorganise the squad members and to safeguard the movement, till he was arrested in 1972 in the big hills near Valasaballeru.

Being implicated in a number of cases in the Agency area, Comrade Krishna Murthy was kept in the Vishakhapatnam Central Jail during the trial of the Parvathipuram Conspiracy Case in which he was an accused. However, as the cases against him were dismissed he was released from jail in 1975. Immediately after that he took the main responsibility for mobilising the Girijan masses and reorganising the Girijan Sangam. In this endeavour, he worked throughout the Emergency period, going from one village to another, without caring for his health. During this period he married Biddika Chilakamma, who stood by him in all his activities till his death.

Meanwhile, by 1975 itself, based on his own experience, Comrade Krishna Murthy had disassociated himself from the left sectarian politics and organisation that dominated the movement during 1968-72 and started working as a devoted member and a responsible area-level cadre of the communist revolutionary party organisation that followed the mass revolutionary line -- first as the APCCR till 1975 and then as the UCCRI(ML). True to his convictions in the proletarian revolutionary line, subsequently too he took a principled stand against the wrong tendencies and deviations that emerged and became dominant in the party organisation from time to time. In this process he came to discharge his responsibilities as the area level cadre of the CCRI from 1988 to 1994, and then of the CPRCI(ML), into which the CCRI merged.

Throughout this period, Comrade Krishna Murthy showed commendable revolutionary tenacity, not losing heart even in the face of repeated setbacks and the complex objective and subjective difficulties that have been coming in the way of giving a tangible shape to the efforts at reorganising the peasant revolutionary movement and organisation in the area. In recent years, with failing health he was finding it difficult to move from one place to another. In recent months his health deteriorated further. Even so, he took upon himself yet another round of efforts to rejuvenate the Girijan Sangam and the party organisation in the area. Till his last breath he was engaged in the preparations to fulfill these twin tasks.

A fitting homage to the departed comrade could only be that of a renewed resolve and vigorous pursuance of the unfinished preparations to fulfill these immediate and pressing revolutionary tasks with a correct proletarian revolutionary orientation. *The Comrade* pledges to stand by the comrades of the area in such an endeavour.

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