

WHAT TO DO ?

C. CHANDRASEKHARA RAO

“Though no significant Naxalite activity has been reported recently in another of their strongholds, Khammam and Warangal districts, there is no indication that the movement has died down there. There has been a tradition of communist insurgency in this area. Since the forties Naxalite activity in Srikakulam has been more dramatic but in Khammam it has been persistent and deep rooted”. (*Indian Express*, Vijayawada edition, 7-2-1970).

Just after a year this was written, the civil authorities have been forced to move in army units to control the situation. This was done on the night of March 1, at strategic points all over the forest areas of the two districts. Mulug taluk in Warangal district alone has over 1,000 men of the Kumaon Regiment. It is estimated that anything between 4,000 troops took up positions in Warangal, Khammam and Karimnagar districts. This is in addition to the 4,000 and 5,000 CRP, SAP and other para-military units already in the area.

Probably this is the first time in the past two decades that army units had to be moved in to control revolutionary activities. Even in West Bengal it was to "ensure peaceful polling" that the army moved in.

What happened during the last year to warrant this move ?

In April 1969, the Revolutionary Communist Committee of Andhra Pradesh led by Mr T. Nagi Reddy adopted the now famous document "The Immediate Programme".

One of the main points mentioned in the document was that in the forest areas of Warangal and Khamman districts, the people's movement has transgressed the general legal limits... The cardinal point in agrarian revolution would be abolition of the landlord system and distribution of land to the tiller. It also means the liberation of rural masses from all forms of feudal exploitation.

Fertile land and fruit gardens that had been grabbed from Girijan peasants are still in the hands of landlords. People have been anxious to take them back. "We must prepare them to occupy these lands. Attacks from Government armed police would start. With this our resistance would have to be unleashed too...also we have to take the agrarian revolution forward basing it on the path of 'People's War'. Then alone we could march forward."

The first step was taken in April 1969, when the landlords as a precautionary measure were neutralised and made ineffective.

The Government's reaction was to move in District Reserve Police and Special Armed Police.

Once the landlords and other exploiting classes had been neutralised, the land programme was taken up in right earnest. Thousands of acres of Government waste land were occupied. Along with this all forms of Girijan exploitation were stopped. It took almost a year to implement the first stage.

Hundreds of Girijans occupying the lands were imprisoned. Along with indiscriminate arrests, the repressive police machinery went into action and the inhabitants of whole villages

were tortured to reveal the whereabouts of the revolutionary leaders. Repression led to a hardening of feelings amongst the Girijans against the police and the Government.

The masses in neighbouring taluks began to appreciate the work done in Mulug taluk, Warangal district. So much so the movement spread to Narsampet and Parkal taluks in Warangal District, Yellandu, Burugampahad, Nugur taluks in Khammam District and Mantheni taluk in Karimnagar District. A total area covering 5,000 to 6,000 sq. miles and inhabited by about 350,000 to 400,000 population came under the control of the revolutionaries.

Towards the end of 1969, CRP units were also moved in and repression increased. The movement gained momentum in direct proportion to police repression.

The State Government, rather the Stolypin of Andhra Pradesh, Mr Vengal Rao, the Home Minister, realised that it was not just a law and order problem. *The Times of India*, Bombay, on January 3, 1970, wrote an editorial saying that "meaningful steps in various social and economic fields" were necessary if the Naxalite challenge was to be met effectively. The State Government had announced a series of measures intended to improve the lot of the Girijans, including restrictions on the activities of moneylenders and tradesmen, grant of land-possession certificates, improvement of irrigation facilities and monetary grants for buying bullocks and agricultural implements.

To hoodwink the masses the Government issued notices of eviction on landlords occupying tribal lands. The same Vengal Rao addressing a meeting of landlords at Cherla, Nugur taluq, in February 1970, advised them to move the courts for stay orders. What hypocrisy !

Eviction notices apart, the Government tried to bribe the tribals by distributing clothes, tobacco etc. and in some cases money gifts. The revolutionaries could warn the tribals about the trap laid for them. Educated by them, the tribals started asking Ministers and officials what they were doing about the

land the Girijans had lost to the landlords. The answer was torture.

According to the Government, special laws to protect the Girijans were enacted in 1917 in the old Madras State to which Nugur taluk was then attached. The same laws became applicable to the rest of the Girijan areas in Warangal, Khammam and Karimnagar districts in 1963 only. The Government pleads that as the law was enacted recently, it is helpless in the Telengana area to which the three districts belong.

The question is why can't the Government implement the law at least in Nugur, Bhadrachalam and other taluqs where the Act had been in force since 1917? Even in the Telengana area most of the grabbing of Girijan land started from about 1960-61 and reached the peak in 1964-66.

In 1965, the Government, to regularise sales of land in Telengana, passed an order now known as "50-B". Registration of land sales was unknown in Telengana for a long time and with the passing of land reform bills in 1951, the process became all the more difficult, so much so that even without registration land sales were common. This led to difficulties maintaining land record. The taluq land registers would show one name, while actual occupant was different. In some cases land has changed hands half a dozen times, yet the name of the original owner remains in the records.

To regularise records, rule "50-B" was introduced. Under it the taluq office itself could, after due enquiry, register the land in the names of the present occupants if they could show documentary proof that they had bought it before 1960.

Rule "50-B" became a rule for corruption and wholesale forgeries. The then tahsildar of Mulug, employing some top Congressmen as his agents, undertook mass registrations of land. Girijan land taken on lease was registered in the names of new owners, using forged documents, etc. Thousands of acres of such rich land passed to landlords. The tahsildar became rich overnight. Even the otherwise blind Government

had to institute an enquiry. Of course nothing came out of this as top Congressmen were involved in the whole racket.

Though stay orders were obtained a year ago the Government is not making any effort to have the orders vacated. It is not in the least interested in de-grabbing Girijan land from the landlords. Even if the Government is to implement the 1917 Act in Nugur and the 1963 Act in the Telengana area, a lot of Girijan land would revert to the Girijans. But it is easier and cheaper to torture and shoot them than let them have their land back.

Ignoring that by the term 'Girijan' the revolutionaries mean 'anybody in that area who is a son of the soil and is downtrodden and exploited,' the Government tried to implement a policy of divide and rule by differentiating between tribals and non-tribals. As the revolutionary movement did not allow such differences, the Girijans were not deceived by the Government.

Torture, bribery, promises, everything that is in the capitalist armoury was tried. Liquidation of a few well-known traitors and informers by the revolutionaries solved the problem.

Freed from fear of informers, traitors and police agents and with the revolutionaries implementing their programme with zeal, the Girijans, from passive spectators became active participants in the struggle.

Village committees came into existence to safeguard the interests of the revolutionary movement. With these taking over local control and defence, the revolutionaries were free to advance and spread the programme to new areas. Since mid-1970 the movement has expanded to embrace villagers in the plains and in spite of the repressive machinery, today it covers an area of about 7,000 to 8,000 square miles with a population of nearly 500,000/600,000.

The Government is spending crores of rupees on paving new roads, constructing bridges etc. for quicker movement. Wireless transmitters have become as common as transistors.

But even the most reactionary of the landlords and other exploiting classes in the area have been neutralised and are offering the repressive machinery no co-operation. For all practical purposes civil rule is absent.

Realising their helplessness, the civil authorities on March 1, handed over the area to the army to implement "Phase Three" of the repressive programme.

According to reliable information, "Phase Three" is the same as the American "strategic villages" plan in Vietnam i.e., herding together many scattered villages into concentration camps, so that food supplies do not reach the revolutionaries.

On the night of March 15, after giving a warning to the repressive machinery almost a month ahead, the revolutionaries struck at Pagederu, Khamman district, and removed from scene two well-known police agents, though Pagederu and surrounding villages had a heavy concentration of the law and order forces.

This unnerved the forces and a repressive campaign was launched against villagers within a radius of ten miles of Pagederu. Indiscriminate beating and torture of men, women and children was the order of the day. The Indian Army probably was trying to cover itself with glory by taking a major role in the brutal repression.

As usual, a top-level conference of repression officials took place at Warangal in the last week of March and it was decided to bring in additional men. Camps have been set up in villages all over the area—the maximum distance between villages being not more than 2 to 3 miles. No movement by civilians is allowed after dusk between villages and after dark in the villages. Normal life has come to a standstill and the village economy is in the doldrums.

By April 23 this year, *The Times of India* carried two items, contradicting each other. One was about an interview given by Mr Vengal Rao to newsmen at Madras in which he claimed "that there no longer was a 'Naxalite' problem, in a big way. Even the trouble spots were identified and dealt with

firmly". Rao went further and "paid a tribute to the Andhra police for the 'challenging task' they had accomplished during the last two years to root out the menace".

The other, a *Times of India* News Service item datelined, Hyderabad, 22nd April, had this to say "...In the Warangal and Khamman districts in Telengana the extremists led by the Nagi Reddy Group, have become active again...they are carrying on intimidation and assault on public servants, a senior official who has visited the district said."

The two news items give a clear picture of the confusion into which the Government has been thrown.

The other side of the picture is that the revolutionaries lack fire-power. Mao has rightly said that it is men that count, not weapons. But still what will you do ?

June 12, 1971