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FIFTY YEARS OF THE KISHAN SABHA

E.M.S. NAMBOODIRIPAD

ALL INDIA KISAN SABHA

FOREWORD

THIS IS THE SIXTH IN THE SERIES OF PAMPHLETS issued to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the All India Kisan Sabha. Written by Comrade E.M.S. Namboodiripad, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and one of the founders of the AIKS, it gives a lucid account of the rise and development of the peasant movement and the organisation of the Sabha.

Starting with his experience in Malabar which formed part of the then composite Madras State, he deals with the policies and activities of the All Indian Kisan Sabha which made it a powerful organisation of the Indian peasantry. He explains that in defence of the interests of peasantry, at many places it had to come in conflict with the Congress which was trying to restrain the peasantry. Comrade EMS explains the role which the Kisan Sabha played in the struggle for independence as well as in solidarity with the peoples fighting for national liberation.

The Sabha was also in the forefront of the struggle against fascism and propagated the idea that the fate of the whole peasantry is linked with the victory over fascism in the Second World War.

The author also explains as to how the Kisan Sabha was in the forefront in the post-war upsurge, leading and guiding the mass of peasantry in various struggles in different parts of the country, rallying them behind the slogans of agrarian revolution alongwith the country's independence.

He also gives a self-critical appraisal of the shortcomings in the work of the Kisan Sabha, expecially in the post-independence period, and emphasises the new orientation which is necessary for building the kisan movement, taking into consideration the changes in the agrarian structure since independence. This will prove very educative for the kisan cadre who are engaged in building the Kisan Sabha.

Harkishan Singh Surjeet

FIFTY YEARS OF THE KISAN SABHA

E.M.S. Namboodiripad

I AM ONE OF THE FEW SURVIVORS OF THOSE WHO met in April 1936 at Lucknow to form the All India Kisan Congress (later renamed the All India Kisan Sabha). The foundation meeting adopted the following main resolutions :

1. "The object of the All India Kisan Congress is to secure complete freedom from economic exploitation of the peasantry, and the achievement of full economic and political power for the peasants and workers and all other exploited classes.

"The main task of the Kisan Congress shall be the organisation of the peasants to fight for their immediate political and economic demands in order to prepare them for their emancipation from every form of exploitation.

"The Kisan Congress stands for the achievement of ultimate economic and political power for the producing masses through its active participation in the national struggle for winning complete independence of India.

2. "Whereas the present system of Zamindari (in Orissa, Bengal, Madras and Assam). Talukdari (U.P. and Gujarat), Malguzari (C.P.), Estemardari (Ajmer), Khote (Deccan), Jenmi (Malabar), Inamdari (involving as it does the vesting of ownership of vast areas of land and the right of collecting and enjoying enormous rent incomes), instituted and supported by the British Government in India, is iniquitous, unjust, burdensome and oppressive to the Kisans (peasants), etc.

"And whereas the Zamindars, etc. repress and oppress the crores of their tenants while neglecting to repair the irrigation resources

"All such systems of landlordism shall be abolished and all the rights over lands be vested in the cultivators.

3. "Whereas the present system of land revenue and resettlement imposed by the Government in ryotwari areas have proved too oppressive and vexatious, and resulted in pauperisation of the peasant, all such systems of land revenue be abolished and replaced by a graduated land tax upon net incomes of Rs. 500 and more (as recommended by the Texation Enquiry Committee)."

Although thus joining my colleagues in forming the All India organisation—which addressed itself to the common problem of the entire Indian people (complete independence from the British) as well as the specific problems of the peasantry holding land under various tenures—I was at that time confining my activities to my home state of Kerala, which was then divided into Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. My active participation in the kisan and general political movement was in fact confined to Malabar. The records of the All India Kisan Congress (or Sabha) mentions *Malabar* rather than *Kerala* as the area or province which was represented at the Lucknow Conference.

The beginning of the kisan movement in the Malabar part of the present-day Kerala can be traced to the years 1933-34 when those of us leftist Congressmen, who had been released from the jail, decided to organise the workers and peasants on the basis of a radical programme. The rural people (not only poor but even the better off sections) had been seriously affected by the worldwide depression whose impact was felt in India all the more. We learnt, at the same time, of the magnificent development of the first Socialist country in the world—Soviet Union—through its planned development. This indeed was a matter of great inspiration for us.

An immediate cause that prompted us to go into mass agitation in the rural areas was the increase in land revenue ordered for Malabar, by the Government of Madras. We were also influenced by the worsening question of rural indebtedness to which attention had been drawn by the officially constituted Central and Provincial Banking Committees. Above all, the Government of Madras had enacted an amended Malabar Tenancy Act which provided relief only for a narrow stratum

of upper tenants (called *Kanamdars*), leaving the large number of tenants called *Verumpatamdars* to the mercy of the *Jenmis* (landlords).

The movement and organisation we visualised was therefore calculated to serve the cause of the entire peasantry, including the richest of them, though its main thrust was for securing relief for the poorest.

It was thus on the basis of the limited work in my own area that I participated in the founding conference of the organisation 50 years ago. Naturally, therefore, I had nothing to contribute in the conference discussions on the agrarian problems at the all-India level. By and large, I was a listener. After the conference too, my participation in the All India deliberations and activities was minimal.

In my own home district of Malabar, however, the movement and organisation was making rapid strides. Radical changes in the existing Malabar Tenancy Act, giving the same type of relief to the *Verumpatamdars* as had been provided to the better off *Kanam tenants* in the 1931 Malabar Tenancy Act, was the central demand around which the Kisan Sabha was being built up. A series of conferences and rellies at the village, taluka and district levels were organised to ventilate the demands of the peasants in general and for amendment in the Malabar Tenancy Act in particular.

In the process of developing the movement in Malabar, we the left-Congressmen came into direct conflict with our rightsist Congress colleagues who were interested, apart from other questions like indebtendness, price, land-revenue, etc., only in the protection of the already protected better off *Kanam* tenants. We had the advantage of support from Congressmen at the grass roots level, even from many Taluka Congress Committees. Subsequently, our position at the provincial level of the organisation itself became stronger when I become the Organising Secretary of the PCC for a year (1937), and then the Secretary of the PCC for two years (1938-40). This 3 year-period helped us in organising Congress Committees down to the village level which became the centres of activities, including those of the Kisan Sabha which grew at a rapid pace, both as an independent organisation of the peasants and as an integral

and very significant part of the anti-imperialist movement headed by the Congress.

The assumption of office by the Congress Ministry in 1937 helped the further development of the movement. Apart from facilitating extensive activity of radical Congressmen and kisan activists in general the Rajaji Ministry gave big relief to the peasants by promulgating an ordinance radically reducing agrarian indebtedness. Followed as the ordinance was by the introduction and passing of a regular bill in the Assembly, it gave confidence to the rural poor that, with such a Government at the provincial centre, they can successfully fight for other demands as well, provided they strengthend their organisation. The struggle for the radical amendment of the Tenancy Act thus received a big boost.

The Revenue Minister of the Rajaji Government was T. Prakasham, known as 'Andhra Kesari'. Keenly interested in radical legislation with regard to the zamindari tenants he had a Committee constituted by the Government to enquire into the problem of zamindari. It submitted a report containing radical recommendation restricting the rights of statutory landlords. This again engendered hope and confidence among the rural poor in Malabar that they can get their major demand (for radical amendment of the Tenancy Act) accepted by the Government. The agitation therefore continued on a far bigger scale than ever before. Revenue Minister Prakasham himself visited some of the hot spots of the agitation (where tenants had in fact withheld payments to *Jenmis*) and, after meeting representatives of the movement in several places, recommended to his Government that a Committee should be coustituted to examine the question of tenancy reform in Malabar.

A Committee thus came to be constituted. Its members included the leftist President of the Provincial Congress Committee, Mohd. Abdul Rehman who was member of the Legislative Council, together which another leftist Congress MLA and myself. The Committee visited various talukas in the districts where huge demonstrations were organised by the Kisan Sabha. We the three leftist members of the Tenancy Enquiry Committee also participated in the demonstrations. The tour of the

Committee became another landmark in mass mobilisation and agitation in the rural areas.

With the backing of this mass movement, the three leftist members of the Committee appended their individual minutes of dissent to the report prepared by the Chairman and Secretary on behalf of the majority of members of the Committee. Although the substance of the concrete proposals for amendment made by the three of us was the same, my dissenting minute was distinctive : it had a fairly long preamble tracing the historical development of the *Jenmi* system in Malabar and the harm that it does to the modernisation and development of the district's economy. The preamble concluded that the abolition of the *Jenmi* system without compensation to the *Jenmi* (while providing some relief for the poorer sections among them) was the essential prerequisite for the modernisation and development of the economy.

The ideas contained in my minute of dissent provided the theoretical basis on which all subsequent agitations in the Malabar part of Kerala were based. Together with the addition of points relavant to the then Cochin and Travancore states where the *Jenmi* system was extremely weak, the understanding given in that dissenting minute, became the basis on which the first elected Government of the newly-formed state of Kerala, headed by me, elaborated the lines along which the Agrarian Relations Bill came to be drafted in 1957.

It is worth mentioning here that the majority in the Tenancy Enquiry Committee against whose approach we the leftist members appended our minutes of dissent, were a combination of Congress MLAS and a few others, including the one elected from a special constituency where only the *Jenmis* had the vote. Here therefore was a clear division on class and political lines ; on the one side were the Congress MLAs of the rightist political complexion joining hands with the avowed representatives of the *Jenmis* ; on the othere were the elected representatives of the left who had a majority in the Provincial Congress Committee but were a minority in the Tenancy Committee itself. It is interesting to note that the argument advanced in the majority report against our proposal for rent reduction was that such reduction would not enable those who have invested money

in the purchase of land to get reasonable return on their investments. Such was the unashamedly pro-*Jenmi* stand taken by the rightist Congressmen who constituted almost a dozen members of the Committee.

It is therefore not surprising that, when the approach adopted in my minute of dissent was sought to be given legislative form 17 years later, in the Agrarian Relations Bill piloted through the legislature by the first Communist Government in Kerala—the Congress organisation (in the state itself and at the Centre) moved heaven and earth to have it sabotaged. The 28 months of the existance of that Government, followed by the notorious "liberation struggle" organised by the anti-Communist front ; the pro-landlord amendments to the Bill made after the mid-term elections by the anti-Communist Government, etc., culminating in the final adoption by the CPI (M)-led Government of the agrarian legislation in 1969—all these were marked by the unending conflicts between the rural poor organised under the leadership of the Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party on the one side, and the rural vested interests led by the Congress and its reactionary political allies on the other.

Thus far about my role in developing the movement in my home state of Kerala. It is now necessary to explain what happened at the all-India level. For, since 1943 (the Bhakna session of the AIKS) I became actively associated with the working of the all-India organisation as well. I was not upto then any functionary of the all-India organisation ; in fact, I had not even attended any all-India session except the first (Lucknow) and the second (Faizpur)—neither Comilla nor Gaya, nor Palasa, nor Bihta. I was elected, for the first time, one of the all-India Joint Secretaries at Bhakna (1943) and repeatedly at Vijayawada and Netrakona. Since then, I stopped being an office-bearer, though I regularly attended almost every all-India session and was thus associated with the working of the organisation. At the same time, of course, I was more closely associated with the activities of the Kisan Sabha in Kerala. It is on the basis of this experience that I am sharing with the readers my assessment of the work of the Kisan Sabha—achievements as well as setbacks—during half a century since it was formed in April 1936.

First, about the positive achievements. The emergence of Indian peasantry as an independent force for the first time in history, rather than as the camp follower of any other class is, according to me, the major achievement. It will be recalled that when, towards the end of the 18th century, region after region came under the authority of the British, it was the peasantry who first rose in revolt under the leadership of the princes of the earlier regime and the feudal chieftains under them. (The 1857 revolt was the last and most widespread struggle of this nature.) Those representatives of the earlier social order, however, surrendered to the British after a short struggle, leaving the fighting peasantry leaderless. Again, after a short interval of a few decades, a new class arose and tried to lead the peasantry in the anti-imperialist struggle—the bourgeoisie. The most typical representatives of this class—the leaders of the Indian National Congress headed by Mahatma Gandhi—however, betrayed the fighting peasants, as was seen in Chauri Chaura (U.P.) after which the Mahatma declared that he had committed a "Himalayan blunder". This left the peasants virtually leaderless.

Having learnt from the experience of the two betrayals by the two classes who were considered their 'natural leaders', the peasants decided to organise themselves independently of, but working in cooperation with, other anti-imperialist classes and strata, including the bourgeoisie. This was the basis on which the anti-imperialist united front came into existence in the mid-1930's, a front of which the All India Kisan Congress (or Sabha) was an integral part from the very beginning. The Sabha had a clear perspective concerning the political direction of its struggle (complete independence, to be won in common struggle with the entire people) and an economic objective (abolition of landlordism without compensation). With this twin perspective and aim, it has worked tirelessly to secure its immediate demands as spelt out from time to time and in area after area. That was how, for half a decade after its formation in 1936, the Sabha extended its activities and organisation to almost every province, every part of the country.

The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, however, created certain difficulties. In the first stage of the

war, the organisation was faced with unprecedented terror unleashed by the British Government. This, however, was relaxed a little in the second phase of the war when, together with some other mass organisations and leftist political parties, the Sabha declared itself on the side of the anti-fascist forces led by the Soviet Union. It, however, had to meet determined opposition from a large section of the anti-imperialist movement, including many who had helped the formation and development of the Kisan Sabha.

Even in this period, however, the Sabha adopted a stand which, though not understandable to lakhs of sincere anti-imperialists at that time, was fully in accordance with the national interests, with the cause of Independence. As was pointed out in the political resolution adopted by the Central Kisan Council in September 1942, the Sabha condemned the British Government for the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi and the entire Congress leadership, and unleashing a reign of indiscriminate repression. The resolution put the main responsibility on imperialism and its bureaucracy for perpetrating the political crisis in the country. This attitude of imperialism, it pointed out, so angered the people that they organised in several places the sabotage of national defence, looting and anarchist attacks. This, in its turn, made the Government resort to such terror as had never happened before. The resolution therefore appealed to the patriotic traditions of the people and called for national unity against British imperialism and against fascism. It called for unity between the Hindu and Muslim masses, between various castes and communities, and between all patriotic sections in the towns and in the villages, for securing national demands.

These calls were, of course, not properly understood by the people at the time, since they were concerned, above all, with imperialist repression and struggle against it. However, the political and organisational work carried out by the Kisan Sabha in cooperation with all other patriotic organisations, parties, groups and individuals—particularly the countrywide campaign to aid the famine ridden Bengal, the worst famine that had gripped that unfortunate province in 1943 ; the serious (though on a smaller scale than that of Bengal) food crisis,

epidemics etc., in almost every State—and the selfless work done by the activists of the Sabha along with all other patriotic organisations, helped the organisation to continue its lin ks with the masses for the whole durations of the war.

This enabled us at the end of the war to reforge the links with the people and go actively into organising a series of militant struggles such as

—the Tebhaga struggle in rural Bengal which united the Hindus, the Harijans and the Muslims even while communalism was doing havoc in the rest of the country ;

—leading militant peasants' struggles in Malabar, Andhra the Warli areas of Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamilnadu, and so on ;

—organising militant struggles of the states' people all over the country, culminating the militant organisation of the historic Punnapra-Vayalar uprising by the coir workers and the rural poor of Alleppey and Shertallai talukas in Travancore ;

—above, all, carrying on for half a decade the armed peasant partisan struggle in Telangana.

It was the work done by the Kisan Sabha for a decade since its formation which enabled the kisan activists and their allies in the abovementioned states to come out as the champions of the militant struggles in the revolutionary upsurge which preceded the August 15, 1947 transfer of power.

The political significance of these struggles is that, for the first time after the bourgeoisie assumed the leadership of the anti-imperialist movement with the call for "non-violent mass resistence to the foreign rulers", a class political alternative had come into existence. By no way behind, in fact ahead of, the bourgeoisie in anti-imperialist militancy, this alternate leadership had its own political perspective—uncompromising struggle culminating in revolutionary seizure of power, and also an alternative programme of developing free India, consistent implementation of democracy for the people including radical agrarian reforms, confiscation of property owned by foreigners, etc. Furthermore, alternate forms of political organisation based on the organised activity of the toiling people.

The most brilliant example of this was set by the several

thousands of peasant partisans in Telangana who took over the lands and other properties of big landlords, and established their own authority in a large area, continuing it for almost half a decade. This was the real alternative to the humiliating terms on which the bourgeoise arrived at a negotiated settlement with the British, leading to the formation of two hostile States—the Indian Union and Pakistan. This negotiated settlement culminated in the disastrous exchange of population on communal basis, heaping indescribable suffering on both sides of the border between the two newly-created States.

The question arrises : could the tragedy of 1947 and the following couple of years of murder, loot and arson have been avoided if the alternative political force represented by the Kisan Sabha and other militant mass organisations had become powerful enough, at the end of the war, to offer a real challenge to be bourgeoisie ? Was not the weakness of the alternative leadership (of which the Kisan Sabha was an integral part) the real reason why our anti-imperialist struggle ended in such a tragedy ?

The point, however, is that, though not powerful enough to prevent the tragedy, an alternative political force had emerged and that the Kisan Sabha was an integral part there of.

This became clear when the results of the first general election in free India came out. Wherever there had been storng peasant organisations rallied under the Kisan Sabha and led by the Communist Party, combination of left and other opposition forces won magnificent victories, becoming the main Opposition in Parliament and recognised Opposition in 4 State Assemblies (West Bengal, Hyderabad, Madras and Travancore-Cochin). In the latter two, in fact, the opposition United Front came very near the formation of non-Congress Government—a development which could prevented only by the use of the Central Government's and the Governors' powers.

This indeed was a significant advance for the left.

The formation of the first Communist Government in Kerla, with its modest programme of giving relief to the working people, including land reforms, showed the emergence of a political force alternative to those of the bourgeois—landlord

classes—rnling and Opposition.

The successive general elections that were held, beginning with those of 1952, showed that thanks to the militant leadership given to the peasant movement by the Communist Party, the latter proved to be the strongest political party in all those areas where the peasant struggles were fought in pre-independence years. The repeated efforts made by the ruling party to dislodge the Party from that position have failed, as is seen in the continued existance of the two Left Front Governments in West Bengal and Tripura and in the position of the Party in Kerala for 30 years, either heading the Government or as the major Opposition.

One consequence of this development is that the concept of basic land reforms which originally hadbeen confined to the left —the Communists, the socialists and radical forces in all parties —became, in thepost-independence years the policy of the entire nation. The bourgeoisie which is heading the Government, in fact, took the initiative in mass mobilisation for land reforms (Vinoba's Bhave movement) and in legislative action (a series of enactments, beginning with Kashmir and Hyderbad in the early post-independence years). The former was offered as the Sarvodaya alternative to the Telangna struggle, while the latter became the weapon with which to meet the electoral challange from the left. Mention should be made of the proposals on land reforms made by the Planning Commission which went far ahead of any previously made by the ruling party. This, obviously, was made as a counterblow to the challenge posed by the left.

These manoeuvres of the bourgeoiste were made full use of by the first Communist Government in Kerala and the following United Front or Left Front Governments headed by the Communists Party. The measure of land reforms outlined officially by the ruling party but earnestly carried out only by the left-led state governments have in fact become the poin of demarcation between the left and the right in Indian politic the left and the right Opposition parties included.

It is not proposed in this article to examine the outcome of the land reforms caried out in the post-independence years either by the Congress or left Governments in states. Not

because they are not imporant in themselves; they no doubt are. It is, however, not the gains made by the peasants out of the land reform measures that are of basic importance. As Marx and Engels remarked in the *Communist Manifesto*, from time to time the workers are victorious, though their victory is fleeting. The real fruit of their battle is not the immediate success, but their own continually increasing unification...when the class war is about to be fought to a finish disintegration of the ruling class and the old order of society becomes acute, that a small part of the ruling class breaks away to make common cause with the revolutionary class, the class which holds the future in its hand."

Looking from this angle at the positive gains made by the Kisan movement in the pre-independence years, it can be seen, the advance registered by the organised peasantry cannot be councted in the relief secured but the role played by it as an independent political force operating within the framework of the anti-imperialist movement. The struggle for partial demands was so integrated with the freedom movement that, as through the trade union movement of the working class, the peasants no doubt obtained through tha Kisan Sabha some concessions only because they fought side by side with the other classes and strata in the freedom struggle..

In the most wide spread and militant struggle of the pre-independence years—Telangana—the organised seizure and redistribution of jagirdars' land was a by-product of the political struggle in which the peasant partisans became the vanguard of the anti-feudal forces, not only in Telangana but in the entire country. It was to meet this offensive of the organised peasantry that the bourgeoisie resorted to the twin political manoeuvres of *Bhoodan* and legislative enactments but simultaneously used the methods of brutal terror.

The question arises : did the Kisan Sabha and the left forces that led the organisation succeed in meeting this challenge ? Did it become the basis on which a leadership alternative to the bourgeoisie grew stronger and stronger ? We who were the pioneers of the movement 50 years ago and who worked to develop it during this half-a-century, should make some serious criticism of ourselves if further progress is to be registered. I am jotting down below a few points which perhaps can form the

basis of intense discussions among ourselves.

As will be readily admitted by every kisan activist who has a serious attitude to his/her own movement, taking the country as a whole the post-independence years have, for the Kisan Sabha, been a period of stagnation. As compared to the earlier period of 16 years, i.e., up to the first general elections, when the movement, together with the left political movement, struck deep roots in the areas covered by the present-day states of West Bengal and Tripura at one end and Kerala and Andhra at the other, there has since then been no expansion in new areas. There has in fact been a setback in Andhra which is not counter-balanced by the relative growth in 3 of the 4 states mentioned above. The further growth in these 3 states, to which the ruling classes had to react by making concessions to the peasantry, did no doubt have its impact on all-India politics, as is seen in the role played by the Communists in uniting the democratic and secular forces in the struggle against authoritarianism. The organised mass movement and the left political parties, however, have not expanded into and taken deep roots in areas where they were not strong 34 years ago (the first general elections). Why this lag between the political influence exerted, and the organisational position of the movement ? How to overcome the lag, take up the thread where it was left 34 years ago ?

The All-India Kisan Sabha was formed 50 years ago when, together with the entire Indian people, the kisans saw in the then British rulers the external enemy and together with the rural toiling people, saw in the zamindar, talukdar, jagirdar, Jenmi, etc., the internal enemy. Directed as the movement was against this twofold enemy, the kisans put before themselves the twin objective of complete independence and abolition of landlordism. The objective placed before the people in the resolution of the founding session of the organisation was the achievement of ultimate economic and political independence for the producing masses through active participation in the national struggle, for winning complate independence for India.

August 15, 1947, followed by a series of anti-landlord laws enacted by the free and independent government of the country, however, made some important changes in regard to both the

external enemy of the Indian people as well as the internal enemy of the rural poor. What exactly are the changes, how far have they affected the perspectives and policies of the mass movements and left political parties ? Confusion centring around this question is, in my opinion, the basic political reason why the mass movements and left political parties have been marking time during the last three decades.

That the British rulers "quit India" in 1947 is a fact which cannot be controverted. Does this, however, mean that our anti-imperialist struggle has come to a successful conclusion and that our people can proceed to build a new modern democratic state and society in the country ?

In a juridical sense, the answers is *yes* : those into whose hands political power passed on August 15, 1947 could have built a new India envisaged in the days of freedom struggle, in such documents as the Karachi Congress resolution on fundamental rights and Faizpur resolution on the agrarian problem, if they had the political will. This, however, was lacking. As a matter of fact, the moment the Congress party assumed the governmental leadership of free India, it launched an offensive against the organised working class and peasantry, and the left political parties that were leading the mass movements and struggles. For full four years since 15 August, 1947, the engines of repression were ruthlessly driven against the people wherever they were fighting for the realisation of what they had been promised during the years of freedom struggle.

Only on the eve of the first general elections of 1952, were some relaxations made in the repressive regime. Even at that stage, however, many activists of the worker-peasant movements had to remain in jail or underground ; some (like the author of this article) had to file nominations from the underground or jail. Particularly in the Telangana area of Andhra Pradesh, thousands were in jail or underground. Only after the spectacular electoral victory of the Communist and other left parties in all areas of militant struggles, did the Government relax its policy of repression. The opportunity for legal agitations and struggles, available since then, was thus not a gift of the ruling classes but a hard-won right of the people.

This opportunity was, however, subject to serious limitations.

Apart from the use of the repressive organs of administration against all militant struggles of the people which was the normal practice everywhere, the government has never been prepared to tolerate the masses using the mechanism of elections to bring into existence state governments pledged to bring about limited changes in policies, formally declared but unimplemented by Congress governments. This was seen first in Kerala in 1957-59, then in Kerala and West Bengal (1967-69), and finally in West Bengal, Tripura and for a brief while in Kerala again. A combination of methods—agitations (like the "liberation struggle" in Kerala"), parliamentary manoeuvres and intrigues, use of the Central machinery and Governor's office, etc.—was used to prevent the coming into existence of if possible, or to topple the governments whose formation could not be prevented. This reached its zenith in seml-fascist terror regime in West Bengal in the seventies.

The fact this offensive could be beaten back, that the CPI(M)-led Left Front Governments have been in existence for full 9 years in West Bengal and over 8 years in Tripura, shows the big possibilities for the most rapid expansion of the All India Kisan Sabha and other militant organisations of the toiling people throughout the country. This, however, requires the fulfilment of two essential prerequisites : *firstly*, the widespread confusion on a number of policy issues which has been preventing the unification of all-India organisations in general and the AIKS in particular, should be removed; *secondly*, a number of organisational measures should be adopted to build up a strong all-India centre of the AIKS (and the AIAWU) whose functionaries should give concrete assistance to the state and lower levels of the organisation, so that the present position of the movement and organisation remaining confined to few states and a few pockets is radically changed. The two prerequisites, it should be emphasised, are interrelated.

Let us see the major issues on which confusion persists—confusion which prevents the expansion of the AIKS, its having a well-organised centre which gives concrete guidance to states, its having relations of united action and cooperation with other mass organisations and political parties.

There is, *firstly*, failure to realise that, though in a new

form, the emphasis laid in the original documents of the foundation conference of the AIKS that the organisation is an integral, though independent part of the anti-imperialist united front, is still valid. For although there is no direct colonial rule today over the country, India along with other Third World countries, is subjected to various forces of neo-colonialism. The 101—strong Non-Aligned Movement which raises its voice against the "debt trap" laid by world monopoly capitalism, fights for a just new international economic order and unites with the Socialist countries for strengthening the world peace movement, is therefore the development of the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist front of the thirties of which the AIKS was, from the very begiening, an active partner.

Secondly, it is not seen that, though with the country attaining independence and the bourgeoisie becoming the ruling class the internal class struggle has become intensified, the contradiction between the whole people (including the ruling class) and imperialism has simultaneously deepened. This is the essence of the positively anti-imperialist positions on foreign policy adopted by the ruling classes, though with vacillations and slidebacks. It is therefore, in the class interest of the toiling people, including kisans, that the anti-imperialist aspects of this foreign policy are preserved and strengthened. Opposition to the entire foreign policy of the Government is the hallmark of those whose class interests put them in the camp of international imperialism. Real (i.e., the toiling people's) anti-imperialism demands opposition only to those elements of the foreign policy which amount to compromises with imperialism.

Thirdly, the threat posed to our independence and sovereignty by the imperialist moves around and on the borders of India is not realised. For over three decades since the mid-fifties, American imperialism has been steadily building up the military rulers of Pakistan as a dagger drawn against India and, later, using the reactionary ruling circles in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, etc., to "cut India to size" in the name of fighting "the big brother" attitude of this country. Opposition to imperialist manoeuvres in this region has thus become as much a part of the anti-imperialism of the present times as participation in the Non-Aligned Movement's struggle for a new

international eeonomic order and the world-wide struggle against nuclear destruction and for peace.

Fourthly, the importance of the ruling class stand on these questions, not only from the international but also from the national point of view, is realised only inadequately, if at all. It was the anti-imperialism of the years of freedom struggle that united the people and enabled the bourgeoise to assume the leadership of the people in the thirties.

India is playing a positive role in opposing the imperialist designs to unleash nuclear war and supports the national liberation movements. But unfortunately neither the Government nor the ruling party takes the question of anti-imperialism and peace to the people. The AIKS—the representative of the most numerous section of the Indian people—should, along with the unions and other toilers' organisations in the country, mobilise the masses and build a broad peace movement which, while extending support to positive aspects of the Government's foreign policy, fights its vacillations and compromises. The positive attitude to those elements of foreign policy which help the struggle for world peace and fight imperialist intrigues on our borders is, in other words, also an essential condition for developing a left and democratic opposition to the ruling classes.

Fifthly, the devisive and separatist forces such as casteism, communalism, regional separatism, linguistic and ethnic chauvinism, etc. are seen not as forces being used by imperialism to create conditions of destabilisation in the country but as mere forces of national disruption, if at all. They are seen as forces which are handy in the struggle against the authoritarianism of the ruling party. As a matter of fact, however, experience has shown that the presence of such political forces as represent them in the Opposition. has weakened, rather than strengthened, the struggle against authoritarianism.

Sixthly, proper account is not taken of the change that occurred in the position of the political parties that existed in the thirties and those which came into existence since then. The Congress, which was in opposition to the regime then, is now the head of the present regime. The contradiction between

its leaders and the toiling people in the country have therefore intensified. The millions of its ranks and followers, however, have the same interests as those who are organised in the left political parties and in the fighting organisations of the working people. It should be the constant endeavour of the AIKS to draw them first into united struggles and then into the organisation itself.

Seventhly, it is obvious that this task cannot be discharged unless the class character of the leadership, its betrayal of the interests of the masses, is sharply brought before the ranks and followers of that Party. This, in fact, applies to all the bourgeois Opposition parties, including the one which is a continuation of the second biggest political party of pre-freedom days—the Muslim League—and the biggest party of Hindu communalism, the BJP. There are several other caste-community based and other sectarian disruptive movements and organisations, some of which may sometimes raise some democratic demands and fight for the in the common interests of the people. They, however, try to set a particular section of the Indian people apart from, if not opposed to, the rest. While every effort shold therefore be made to draw the masses in those organisations into common struggle and to have specific forms of united action on limited issues even with the leadership of these organisations, this should not hamper the ideological and political struggle against the separatist programmes and practices of these parties and organisations. The fighting organisations of the toiling people should, in fact, work together with all the secular democratic forces in the common struggle for national unity and against the class policies of the ruling and Opposition groups of bourgeois-landlord parties.

Eightly, there is an incorrect understanding of the role which the struggle for land occupies at present in the development of the kisan movement in the new conditions created by the changes in the agarian structure brought about since independence. The Genral Secretary's report to the Varanasi Session of the AIKS (March 30 to April 1, 1979), for instance, said :

"Land to the tiller and total abolition of landlordism have been basic slogans of the Kisan Sabha since its inception. What

bearing do the changes in the agrarian sector have on these basic slogans ? Before examining these changes, let me state here, at the outset, that the seizure and distribution of the land of the landlords still remains the central slogan for the Kisan Sabha to propagate among the peasantry and other democratic classes. Without a victory of this slogan, there cannot be any solution to rural poverty, unemployment, fast development of a balanced economy in the country, and so on.

"But the correlation of class forces which existed at the time when the Kisan Sabha inscribed these basic aims in its programme, are not the same that exist today. It is necessary for us to understand this change since it has great relevance to the chalking out of our immediate slogans and actions.

"The land reforms which the Congress government set about to introduce after independence were not directed to end landlordism and give land to the tiller though this was the pledge the Congress had made to the peasantry during the freedom struggle These land reforms had only very limited objectives, the main one of which was to reform, not abolish-the old-type feudal londlordism by converting the absentee feudal landlords into capitalist landlords personally supervising cultivation in large farms with farm servants and hired agricultural workers. This is the new-type landlord, who combines in himself elements of both feudalism and capitalism. Another objective was to create a stratum of rich peasants. These two sections were to constitute the political base of the ruling party in the rural areas. They were also to produce the surplus foodgrain necessary for the Government to feed the urban people as well as to produce raw materials for industries. With thousands of crores of rupees from the public exchequer pumped into agriculture, these sections have been helped to adopt modern methods of farming.

"Here I should warn against one tendency. Earlier there was a tendency to altogether ignore the penetration of capitalism into agriculture. Now a reverse tendency is raising its head which eonsiders that feudal landlordism and other semi-feudal relations have almost totally been abolished. This is wrong, comrades. The extent of capitalism in agriculture varies from state to state and even from region to region inside a state.

Here a concrete study of the situation in each area is necessary.

"We have also to note the phenomenon of the monetisation of the entire agrarian ecomy. Today, it is not only those who have a surplus who are taking their produce to the market, even the poor peasant, immediately after the harvest for various reasons, sells his produce in the market and later buys even his foodgrains requirement ftom the market. It is only if this phenomenon is properly understood that we can mount a struggle against the big traders and monopolists.

"Even after the abolition of statutory landlordism like zamindari, jagirdari, etc. concentration of land in the hands of big landlords has not been appreciably reduced. Even today four per cent of top landlords possess 31 per cent of the land.

"Congress land reforms have also resulted in the eviction of millions of tenants who have either joined the ranks of landless agricultural labourers or become tenants-at-will without any rights or protection. Only a section of the earlier tenants could buy a portion of the land on which they were working either by paying compensation in instalments or outright purchase at lower than market rates.

"So, after the Congress land reforms the situation we find in the rural area is that four per cent of big owners have in their possession about one-third of the cultivated land.

"Another ten per cent consists of rich peasants owning roughly five to ten acres of wet or ten to twenty acres of dry land, who contribute manual labour and employ a considerable number of farm servants and agricultural workers.

"Another 15 per cent consists of middle peasants owning two to five acres of wet or ten to twelve acres of dry land. They and their families work on the land but also hire labour in busy seasons.

"Twenty per cent of the rural households are poor peasants possessing one or two acres of wet or two to five acres of dry land. Apart from working on their own land, they have to frequently hire themselves out to earn a living.

"The last 50 per cent are those who own no land at all, earn their livelihood mainly by hiring themselves out as wage-workers or are engaged in handicrafts, village services, etc.

"Of course, it has to be borne in mind that this categori-

sation will vary from state to state and region to region.

"What has to be noted is that unlike in the pre-Independence days, the 25 per cent of peasants—rich and midle peasants—are not moved any longer by the slogan of seizure of landlords' land and its distribution. At the other end the 70 per cent of landless and poor peasants are not conscious and organised enough to go into action for the seizure of landlords' lands; even when they are moved into action, it is only for Government waste land, cultivable forest land, etc. Regarding even surplus land above the ceiling which the landlords are keeping illegally, the struggles as in Kerala or recently in Andhra Pradesh could not go beyond the stage of locating such surplus land and exposing the Government's claims. Only under the United Front Government in West Bengal in 1969 could some of the surplus land be occupied. This we will have to take into consideration when we work out our immediate tasks.

"But what we have to note is that the Congress party which ruled the country for thirty years, while failing to end landlordism, land concentration and growing landlessness, had successfully disrupted the pre-Independence peasant unity. It is true that that unity centered around the rich and middle peasants while today we are striving to build peasant unity centring around the agricultural workers and poor peasants. The ruling class parties, whether Congress or Janata, also used its control over Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads. and also cooperatives, rural banks. etc., to perpetuate the division in the peasantry and the disruption of their unity. The two years of Janata Party Government have shown that its policies in regard to land reforms are no different from those of the Congress. In fact some of the Janata State Governments are proposing to reverse even the Congress legislations to favour the landlords.

"Taking note of these structural changes and their multifarious consequences, we have to come to the conclusion that the slogan of complete abolition of landlordism and distribution of land to the landless and land-poor continues to be the central slogan of the agrarian revolution, a slogan which we have to continue to propagate. But it is a slogan on which we cannot go into action today in most parts of the country.

"While continuing to propagate this as the central slogan, while continuing struggles for surplus land, benami lands, waste land, etc., the Kisan Sabha will have to take up for immediate action such issues as the question of wages of agricuitural workers, house-sites, rent-reduction, 75 per cent of the produce to the sharecroppers, evictions, abolition or scaling down of rural indebtedness, remunerative price for agricultural produce, cheap credit, reduction of burdens and heavy levies like water charges, electricity rates, etc., landlord-goonda attacks with the connivance or direct help of the police, the social oppression of harijans, corruption in administration, etc. These are issues which affect all sections of the peasantry—poor, middle, rich—and they can all be drawn into the movement on them. All these currents have to be brought together to build the maximum unity of the peasantry centering around the agricultural workers and poor peasants to isolate the small stratum of landlords. All this will, of course, depend on how successfully we organise the agricultural workers and poor peasants and bring them into action not only on their own specific demands but also on the general demands of the peasantry as a whole and how far we are able to draw other sections of the peasantry into movements on issues affecting them and on the general demands of the peasantry. There is no doubt that the middle and rich peasants can be drawn into movements on such issues. It is our task so see that while other sections of the peasantry support the agricultural workers in their struggles, the latter in turn extends support to movements on the demands of the peasantry, thus paving the way for building peasant unity."

on the basis of the above understanding, several organisational steps should be taken immediately. The setting up of an effective all-India centre with necessary full-time cadre for giving political and organisational guidance to state units should get priority over every ether organisational step. One of the tasks to be undertaken immediatkly by the centre should be to organise central and state schools for continuous training of activists who can build the organisation at below-the-state levels. The activists so trained should be in a position to give necessary leadership to units at the lowest but key level the village—

of the kisan and the agricultural labour organisations ; should have living. day-to-day contact with the majority of the people, mobilising them on every issue that affects their daily life. Strengthening the two links in the chain of the organisation—the all-India centre and the village—is, in other words, central to the problem of organisation, the problem of continuing the traditions of the 50 years-old organisation with its proud heritage but geared to the present and future of the rural toilers.

Finally, comes the question of kisan and general democratic unity which mean :

—Unity of action with other organisations of the peasantry on as many issues as possible with the perspective of having a single united organisation of the peasantry on the basis of clear cut programme of agrarian revolution in which peasant activists of all religious views. ideological trends, political formations etc., can work together on a democratic basis ;

—Unity of the Kisan Sabha and the agricultural labour organisation at every level, from the All-India centre to the village ;

—Unity of both the Kisan Sabha and the agricultural labourers in the village with other class and mass organisations, with all democratic organisations interested in isolating the handful of rural oppressors ;

—Unity at the all India, state and district levels between the Kisan Sabha and the agricultural labour oaganisations on the one hand and the Trade Unions, other class, mass and political organisations fighting against the bourgeois-landlord classes led by the big bourgeoisie which is collaborating with foreign monopolies ;

—Unity among all radical, forward looking secular forces which are fighting for the modernisation of socio-cultural life, against revivalism and obscurantism of all types which, it should be noted, is an integral part of the anti-feudal struggle.

Recent political developments in the country—continuing and increasing isolation of the ruling party from the people, the total inability of bourgeois Opposition parties to unite themselves and unite the people on the basis of policies and programmes alternative to those of the ruling party, the heightened activity of the caste, communal and other separatist forces which, with the active and multiform support of imperialism—have created a situation in which the independence, sovereignty,

national unity can be defended and strengthened only if mass of the working people are brought into action. Herein lies the importance of the expansion of the Kisan Sabha as an all-India organisation, having actively functioning units at the grass-root level, and forging strong fraternal links, and co operating with all other democratic organisations. It is, in fact, idle to think of building a left and democratic unity without a quantitative and qualitative growth of the organisation which came into existence 50 years ago. □

TO commemorate the Golden Jubilee Year of the All India Kisan Sabha, the Central Kisan Council has planned to bring out a series of pamphlets which will highlight the various important movements conducted in various states under the banner of the Kisan Sabha—movements which assumed national significance. This will help the Kisan cadre to understand the important role which the AIKS has played in awakening the Indian peasantry.

The following pamphlets have hitherto been published :

1. *Revolt of the Warlis*, by Godavari Parulekar, Vice-President, AIKS ;
2. *Tebhaga Struggle of Bengal*, by Abdullah Rasul, Vice-President, AIKS ;
3. *Kerala : Punnapra-Vayalar & Other Struggles*, by V.S. Achyuthanandan, member, CPI(M) Polit Bureau, and T.K. Ramakrishnan, President, Kerala state unit of the AIKS ;
4. *Anti-Betterment Levy Struggle of Punjab*, by Harkishan Singh Surjeet, member, CPI(M) Polit Bureau ;
5. *Struggle of the Surma Valley Peasantry*, by Biresh Misra, Pranesh Biswas, and Achintya Bhattacharya ;
6. *Fifty Years of the Kisan Sabha*, by EMS Namboodiripad, General Secretary, CPI(M) ;
7. *Gana Mukti Parishad in Building the Peasant Movement in Tripara*, by Dasrath Deb, Deputy Chief Minister, Tripura, and member, CPI(M) Central Committee.

We are making efforts to get pamphlets written on other movements as well.

All those interested in knowing about the peasant struggles in India, must send orders to—

ALL INDIA KISAN SABHA
12-B Ferozshah Road, New Delhi—110 001

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