

## Chapter V

### THE PEASANT — THE CENTRAL FIGURE IN LAND REFORMS

ABOLITION of landlordism and free distribution of land to the peasants is opposed by the spokesmen of landlords very often on the ground that it will unfavourably affect agricultural production. A few big well-to-do owners with adequate resources to carry on efficient production, they argue, will produce far more than thousands of small cultivators with little or no resources for efficient cultivation.

The bankruptcy of this argument will be clear from the fact that it is precisely in those countries where landlordism has been abolished that agricultural production is increasing at a rapid rate. The need for abolition of landlordism having been thus irrefutably established, spokesmen of landlords are now advancing two new arguments; *one*, that, when abolishing landlordism, the interests of landlords too should be adequately safeguarded, either by paying "equitable compensation", or by allowing the "right of resumption", or by any other means; *two*, that not only should landlordism be abolished but such a pattern of agrarian economy should be worked out as would lead to efficient production.

It is an irony of fate that this should lead the spokesmen of the landlords to the example of those countries where abolition of landlordism has been fully carried out and where this revolutionary step has been followed

by collectivisation and increase in production. These spokesmen of the landlords would like India to adopt collective or co-operative farming on the model of these socialist countries, without, of course, going through the process of abolishing landlordism.

It is, again, an irony of fate that, in this advocacy of a collective or co-operative pattern of the future agrarian economy, there should be virtual agreement between the advocates of "agrarian reform" inside the Congress and several of the "Left" parties in the country. For example, the main slogan of both the Congress Agrarian Reforms (Kumarappa) Committee, as well as some of the "Left" parties is that the hundreds of thousands of small cultivators who will get land as a result of agrarian reform should not be permitted to hold these lands and cultivate them as their own, but should be brought into some form of co-operative farming. Those "Left" parties which advocate this policy often accuse the Communist Party of refusing to follow the teachings of Lenin and the example of the Soviet Union.

This pseudo-Leninist argument is only further evidence to show that these "Left" parties are at one with the Congress in its isolation from the peasant masses. For, the essence of Leninism lies in its firm adherence to the principle of the alliance of the working class with the mass of peasantry. It is on this question of worker-peasant alliance, among other questions, that Lenin sharply demarcated himself from the Mensheviks: he pointed out that, while the strategy of the Mensheviks was one of class collaboration between the working class and the bourgeoisie with a view to sabotage the revolutionary struggles of the toiling people, the revolutionary strategy of all honest socialists should be one of alliance between the working class and peasantry with a view to successfully implementing the programme of revolutionary transformations in industry and agriculture.

Loyal disciple and continuer of the founders of Marxism as he was, Lenin referred to a very important principle laid down by Engels in his celebrated work, *Peasant Question in France and Germany*. Engels wrote:

“We foresee the inevitable ruin of the small peasant but we are not called upon to hasten it by our interference. . . . When we secure the possession of the power of the State, we shall not think of forcibly expropriating the small peasants (either with or without compensation), as we shall be obliged to do in the case of the large landowners. Our purpose with regard to the small peasants must be primarily to transform their private production and private property into co-operative production and co-operative property, *not however by force, but by dint of example and by offering public assistance for the achievement of this end.*” (Emphasis added.)

It was this Marx-Engels teaching that guided Lenin in leading the peasant uprising in Russia on the eve of and after the October Revolution. It is well-known that the Bolshevik Party at the time of the Revolution was not the leader of the peasantry, the latter having been brought under the leadership of the Socialist-Revolutionaries. The programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries was in basic contradiction with the agrarian programme of the Bolshevik Party. This was pointed out by certain dogmatists in Russia to oppose an alliance between the Bolshevik Party and the Socialist-Revolutionaries. Lenin, however, was not a dogmatist but a creative Marxist. He, therefore, unhesitatingly worked out the Bolshevik-Socialist-Revolutionary alliance which proved to be the bulwark of the successful onslaught on the militarist-feudal state system.

Lenin did, of course, carry on an unrelenting struggle against the programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries,

exposed the falsity of the claims made by the leaders of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and educated the mass of the peasantry on the path which they had to take in their struggle against their class enemies. But he stood for an alliance with them, and he ridiculed the arguments of the opportunist wing of the Social-Democrats against alliance with the Socialist-Revolutionaries as follows: “*Since the Socialist-Revolutionaries are petty-bourgeois, ‘we’ reject their philistine, utopian conception of Socialism, for a bourgeois negation of Socialism. . . . Reconcile yourselves to the reign of capital because ‘we’ are not yet ripe for Socialism. . . . Reconcile yourselves to capitalism because the Socialist-Revolutionaries are petty-bourgeois utopians—that is what the Mensheviks say to the peasants.*”

As against this opportunist stand on the peasant question, he worked out the stand of “the revolutionary Social-Democrats who have never abandoned their criticism of petty-bourgeois illusions of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and *who have never combined* with them unless it be against the Cadets, have always striven to *emancipate* the peasants from the influence of the Cadets and have always advocated, as against the philistine, utopian conception of Socialism, not a liberal reconciliation with capitalism, but a revolutionary proletarian path to Socialism.”

This revolutionary proletarian path to Socialism was mapped out by him as follows: “The peasants want to retain their small holdings, to equalise them according to standards, and to re-equalise them periodically. . . . Let them. No intelligent Socialist will quarrel with the poor peasants on this score. If the land is confiscated, it will undermine the rule of the banks; if farm property is confiscated, it will undermine the rule of capital. And *with the proletariat ruling in the Centre*, with political power transferred to the proletariat, the rest will come

of itself. It will come by 'force of example', it will be prompted by experience itself.

"The crux of the matter is the transfer of political power to the proletariat. Given that, everything essential and fundamental in the programme of the 242 Instructions [These were instructions drawn up by peasant committees under Socialist-Revolutionary leadership against which Lenin made serious criticism, yet he accepted them as the basis of action, since they were drawn up by the peasants themselves—E.M.S.N.] will become possible of realisation. And actual experience will show what modifications are needed for the realisation. That is the last thing to worry about. We are not doctrinaires, our teaching is not a dogma but a guide to action." (Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. VI, pp. 383-88)

It is very instructive to follow how Lenin worked out the practical details of this alliance between the Bolsheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. We are therefore quoting in full a letter written by him on December 1, 1917 and published in the *Pravda*:

"Today, Saturday, December 1 (November 18), in the course of my speech at the Peasant Congress, I was publicly asked a question to which I forthwith replied. It is essential that this question and my reply should immediately be made known to all the reading public, for, while formally speaking only in my own name, I was in fact speaking in the name of the whole Bolshevik Party.

"The matter was as follows.

"Touching upon the question of an alliance between the Bolshevik workers and the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, whom many peasants at present trust, I attempted to show in my speech that the alliance *can* be an 'honest coalition', an honest alliance, for *there is no* radical divergence between the interests of the wage workers

and the interests of the toiling and exploited peasants. Socialism is *fully* able to satisfy the interests of both. And *only* Socialism can satisfy their interests. Hence the possibility and necessity for an 'honest coalition' between the proletarians and the toiling and exploited peasantry. On the other hand, a 'coalition' between the toiling and exploited classes on the one hand and the bourgeoisie on the other *cannot* be an 'honest coalition' because of the fundamental divergence of interests of these classes.

"Imagine, I said, that there will be in the government a majority of Bolsheviks and a minority of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, or let us say, only one Left Socialist-Revolutionary, the Commissar for Agriculture. Could the Bolsheviks in such circumstances practise an honest coalition?

"They could; for, while they are irreconcilable in their fight against the counter-revolutionary elements (including the Right Socialist-Revolutionaries and the defencists), the Bolsheviks would be obliged to *abstain* from voting on questions concerning purely Socialist-Revolutionary points in the land programme approved by the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Such a point, for instance, would be the principle of equal land tenure and the re-distribution of land among the small peasants.

"By abstaining from voting on such a point the Bolsheviks would not in any way be changing their programme. For, given the triumph of Socialism (workers' control over the factories, to be followed by their expropriation, the nationalisation of the banks, and the creation of a supreme economic council for the regulation of the whole economic life of the country), given that, the workers *would be obliged to agree* to the transitional measures proposed by the small toiling and exploited peasants, provided such measures were not detri-

mental to the cause of Socialism. Kautsky, when he was still a Marxist (from 1899 to 1909) frequently admitted—I said—that the transitional measures to Socialism cannot be identical in countries of large-scale and in countries of small-scale agriculture.

“We Bolsheviks would be obliged to abstain when such a point was being voted in the Council of People’s Commissars or in the Central Executive Committee, for, if the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries (and the peasants who support them) agreed to workers’ control, to the nationalisation of the banks, etc., equal land tenure would be only one of the *transitional* measures to complete Socialism. It would be absurd for the proletariat to *impose* such transitional measures; it is its duty, in the interests of the triumph of Socialism, to *give way* to the small toiling and exploited peasants in the choice of these transitional measures, since they can do *no harm* to the cause of Socialism.

“Thereupon, a Left Socialist-Revolutionary (if I am not mistaken, it was Comrade Feofilaktov) asked me the following question:

“How would the Bolsheviks act if in the Constituent Assembly the peasants wanted to carry through a law on equal land tenure, while the bourgeoisie were opposed to the peasants and the decision therefore depended on the Bolsheviks?”

“I replied: In such circumstances, when the cause of Socialism would be assured by the introduction of workers’ control, the nationalisation of the banks, etc., the alliance between the workers and the toiling and exploited peasants would oblige the party of the proletariat to vote for the peasants and against the bourgeoisie. The Bolsheviks, in my opinion, would be entitled when the vote was being taken to make a declaration of dissent,

to record their non-agreement; but to hold back under such circumstances would be to betray their allies *in the fight for Socialism* for the sake of a difference with them on a particular issue. Never would the Bolsheviks betray the peasants in such a situation. Equal land tenure, and like measures, cannot injure Socialism, provided the power is in the hands of a workers’ and peasants’ government, provided workers’ control has been established, the banks nationalised, a workers’ and peasants’ supreme economic organ created to direct (regulate) the whole of the economic life of the country, and so forth.

“Such was my reply.”

(Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. VI, pp. 425-27.)

We dwelt at considerable length on this question of Lenin’s approach to the peasantry in order to make it clear that the essence of Leninism does not consist in a particular method of land utilisation but in the basic approach to the peasantry as a class. This basic approach is that, regardless of what the Party as the vanguard of the proletariat thinks about the land question and its solution, the proletariat, headed by the Party and wielding State power, should help the peasant masses to realise *their* objective as they *themselves* think best; while doing this, of course, the Party will carry on its work of explanation to the peasant masses.

This was a fundamental principle of Leninism which was applied in the solution of those concrete problems which came up again and again in the Soviet Union and are now coming up in all countries of People’s Democracy. It was in the course of solving these problems that Comrade Stalin wrote his celebrated article, “Dizzy with Success”, in which he said:

“The success of our collective farm policy is due, among other things, to the fact that this policy rests on



the *voluntary* character of the collective farm movement, and that it *allows for the diversity of conditions* existing in the various parts of the USSR. Collective farms cannot be set up by force. To do so would be stupid and reactionary. The collective farm movement must rely on the active support of the great bulk of the peasantry. Methods of collective farm construction which are being applied in developed districts cannot be mechanically introduced in the backward districts. To do so, would be stupid and reactionary. Such a 'policy' would discredit the idea of collectivisation at one blow."

He came out very sharply against efforts being "made to *substitute* for preparatory work in organising collective farms, the bureaucratic decreeing of a collective-farm movement, paper resolutions on the growth of collective farms, the formation of collective farms on paper..." (*Problems of Leninism*, pp. 327-28.)

Now, it is this method of bureaucratic collectivisation that is being combated by the State and Party organs in all the Socialist and People's Democratic countries. It is, however, this same principle of bureaucratic collectivisation that is now advocated by some well-meaning champions of agrarian reforms, as, for example, the majority of the Congress Agrarian Reforms (Kumārappa) Committee, which is against allowing cultivators with less than basic holdings to carry on as individual farmers. (See p. 63 for its recommendations.)

It is this method of bureaucratic collectivisation that is proposed also by some of the 'Left' parties. These 'Left' parties are not prepared to accept the well-known principle of Marxism that it is for the working people led by the working class, and not for a group of intellectuals standing above them, to lay down the practical details of how to carry out the revolution and how and when to go on from one stage of the revolution to the

next. As Lenin pointed out, "We do not claim that Marx or Marxists know the road to Socialism in every concrete detail. That would be nonsense. We know the direction of the road, we know what class forces are following the road; but the concrete and practical details will be learnt only from the experience of the millions when they begin to take action." (*Selected Works*, Vol. VI, p. 388.)

Those who are serious about carrying out real agrarian reform should therefore depend not so much on the merits and demerits of particular schemes of land reform as on the question of which scheme or schemes are those that have been evolved and are being implemented by the mass of peasants. It may be that the mass of peasantry would like to have a particular scheme of land reforms which, from a scientific point of view, is not so good as some other scheme worked out by certain intellectuals; that, however, should not lead any revolutionary, who is serious about carrying out real agrarian reform, to the rejection of the scheme evolved by the peasants themselves, based on their own experience and understanding; it should be the endeavour of all honest revolutionaries to help these peasants in carrying out that very scheme which they have themselves evolved. It was this which Lenin emphasised and applied in his advice to the Russian proletariat to make the "242 Instructions" of the Russian peasant organisations (however incorrect some of these instructions were from a scientific point of view) the basis of land reform in Russia.

It is this approach that is lacking on the part of those "Left" parties which make all sorts of proposals for land reform without bothering as to what exactly it is that the peasants actually want. And it is this that has made the most successful of recent agrarian reforms in the world—the agrarian reform in China—the model

for land reforms in colonial and semi-colonial countries. For, the agrarian reform in China was not a matter of a few bureaucrats or intellectuals sitting at the top working out a perfect pattern of agrarian economy. It was a question, in the words of Comrade Liu Shao-chi, of a "systematic and fierce struggle".

How is this systematic and fierce struggle to be carried out and to be made the basis of agrarian reform? Comrade Liu Shao-chi answers that this is to be done by making the Peasant Associations "the main organisational form and executive organs of the forces of agrarian reform. Peasants' Congress at all levels, Committees of Peasants' Associations and the People's Representative Conferences at all levels, should be the centres of activity during the agrarian reform. Sound, active, elements from among the peasantry, together with cadres sent by higher authorities to do agrarian reform work in the rural districts, should become the backbone of the agrarian reform."

Comrade Liu Shao-chi points out that these Peasants' Associations are and should be strengthened as the organs of the mass of the toiling peasantry. He calls for the "purity of the leadership of the Peasants' Associations at all levels" and explains that "the term 'purity' here means to prevent landlords, rich peasants and their agents from joining the peasants' associations and, still more important, from holding leading positions in the peasants' associations. The main leadership of the peasants' associations must be chosen from among the poor peasants and farm labourers. But real alliance with the middle peasants, and, above all, real protection of their land and property (including that of the well-to-do middle peasants) from encroachment is indispensable. At the same time, active middle peasants must be absorbed into the leadership of the peasants' associations.... Peasants' associations should draw in impoverished revolu-

tionary intellectuals and other labouring people in the rural areas. Moreover, the peasants' associations must unite into an anti-feudal United Front, all elements outside the associations who are opposed to feudalism—including enlightened gentry who support agrarian reform—to fight hand in hand against the system of feudal exploitation."

A very important role is assigned to these Peasants' Associations in the Chinese Agrarian Reform Law, Article 10 of which says: "All land and other means of production thus confiscated and requisitioned with the exception of those to be nationalised as stipulated in this Law shall be taken over by the *hsiang*\* peasants' associations for unified, equitable and rational distribution to poor peasants who have little or no land and who have no other means of production." It is these Peasants' Associations which, with the approval of the People's Governments at Provincial or higher levels, decide such important questions as:

— Whether or not "in certain special areas, the land rented out by rich peasants may be requisitioned in part or in whole";

— The considerations like the amount, quality and location of the land which should be taken into account when fixing up the manner of land distribution and readjustment of landholdings;

— Application of the principles laid down by the Central People's Government on the basis of which individuals and families have to be classified as worker, poor peasant, middle peasant, rich peasant, landlord, etc., to the concrete conditions in the local area and, on the basis of such an application, to decide whose land is to be taken and to whom to distribute it, etc.

This emphasis on the mass of peasantry acting

\* *Hsiang* is an administrative unit embracing several villages.

through their Peasants' Associations is the distinguishing feature of all land reforms carried out in the Socialist and People's Democratic countries. It is this that distinguishes real revolutionary land reform from those "reforms" which were carried out in Eastern Europe between the two World Wars, in Japan under MacArthur, in Burma under Thakin Nu and is now being sought to be brought about in India by the Congress Government. It is this distinguishing feature of revolutionary land reform which guarantees the full abolition of landlordism.

It is obvious that such Peasants' Associations cannot be built in a day. They emerge only as a result of a long and protracted struggle to bring the million-headed peasantry into organisation and struggle. That is why the Chinese Communist Party, headed by Comrade Mao, put such a great emphasis on the task of building the revolutionary peasant movement. As early as the 1920s, Comrade Mao had drawn the attention of Chinese revolutionaries to the rise of the peasant movement which he characterised as "a colossal event". He, predicted that "in a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a tornado or tempest, a force so extraordinarily swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it. They will break all trammels that now bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will send all imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local bullies and bad gentry to their graves." He then placed three alternatives before the revolutionaries:

"To march at their head and lead them?"

"Or to follow at their rear, gesticulating at them and criticising them?"

"Or to face them as opponents?"

"Every Chinese is free to choose among the three alternatives, but circumstances demand that a quick choice be made."

It was because the Chinese Communist Party headed by Comrade Mao made the choice in favour of "marching at their head and leading them" that it could build up such a powerful movement, that by the time the Chinese People's Republic was founded, the mass of Chinese peasantry was prepared to undertake the gigantic task of organisation that was necessary to carry out the great agrarian reform.

In India too, if the agrarian reform is to be carried out successfully, attention should be paid to the task of helping the peasant masses to organise themselves and develop their own organised strength to carry out their tasks of construction. It is, however, this that is violently resisted by the Congress and other advocates of spurious agrarian "reform". They realise that the system of land ownership as it exists at present cannot be continued; it therefore has to be reformed; at the same time, they know that these reforms can be "adjusted" to the needs of the landlords, usurers, etc., provided a few bureaucrats and intellectuals standing above the peasants, rather than peasants themselves, are allowed to carry out these reforms. That is why they are putting up the most vicious resistance to the independent class organisations of the peasants, agricultural labourers and other sections of the rural poor—organisations which they denounce as "subversive" and "violent". It is precisely to prevent the emergence of these organisations of the peasants themselves that they have resorted to various disruptive manoeuvres.

These disruptive efforts of the enemies of real agrarian reform have, however, failed in preventing the emergence of a united, organised peasant movement.

For, as has been noted earlier, the independent class organisations of the peasantry began to take shape in the early thirties and were subsequently unified into the All-India Kisan Sabha which was formed at Lucknow in 1936. This organisation has since then been functioning as the central organisation of the Indian peasantry and has had a notable record of struggles. The last 18 years of the history of the Sabha, however, have by no means been smooth. The Sabha has had to face difficulties; even today it is facing difficulties. But the Sabha has been able to overcome many of them. It will, therefore, be useful to conclude this study with a brief review of how the Sabha developed from stage to stage and where it stands now.