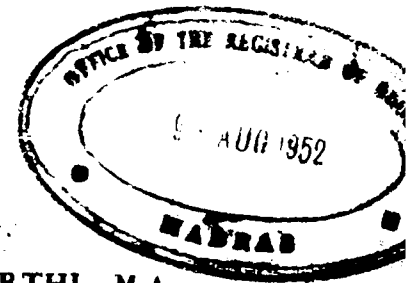


COMMUNIST SPOTLIGHT

ON THE

LAND PROBLEM



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

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T. N. C. C. Research Department.

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PREFACE

THIS booklet, written in October last, is published as a contribution to public discussion, as the recent General Elections in three South Indian States have heightened interest in the land problem as nothing else could have. No revision is made in the main text, only some footnotes bearing on election results and lessons and an appendix are now added.

The sweeping electoral victories of Communists and their known allies in a large number of rural constituencies in Madras, Hyderabad and Travancore-Cochin have come as no surprise to careful observers of visible and incipient agrarian trends. I cannot help recalling in this connection a private discussion I had by sheer chance with the

Chief Minister of a certain State some six or seven months before the Elections. When the discussion veered round to Communism I had the temerity to remark that no amount of repression would eliminate Communist opposition, that it was bound to raise its head in unexpected ways and in unexpected places and that, as the Communists' only possible road to power in Indian conditions was the agrarian road and as time was of the very essence of the matter, a liberal-democratic government should assign first priority to radical land reforms even to the exclusion of all others. Some at least of my arguments were not new to the Chief Minister who was already aware of the need for some kind of reform or other. So he confirmed emphatically

that he was going to take up land reform in all earnestness immediately after the elections. He perhaps thought complacently that the party he represented would sweep the polls in spite of its proven dilatoriness in the matter of agrarian reforms. Poor Chief Minister, he must have tragically underestimated the extent and intensity of agrarian discontent and the resourcefulness of Communists in turning it to their advantage.

A similar unfortunate error of judgment is discernible in the present reluctance of some Congress leaders to face the fact that large sections of the peasant population have, rightly or wrongly, come to have positive faith in the promising agrarian programme of the Communist Party for the immediate future. It would be still more unfortunate if negative and short-sighted policies were to flow out of such a basic error in diagnosis. For, constructive patriotism which thinks in terms of the country's larger interests cannot view with equanimity the development of a situation in which Communists are held and treated

as permanent outlaws in the background of widespread agrarian poverty and discontent and thereby prevented from adopting any but unconstitutional and subversive methods of bringing about political and social change.

Let us not mince matters. The one inescapable lesson of the elections is that the initiative in the matter of land reform has passed to Communist hands. They, in their turn, may be expected to go all-out to consolidate their political gains, even as in Telengana they have consolidated, by participating in constitutional elections, the gains they came to have in the shape of peasant support in the course of unconstitutional redistribution of land. To wrest the initiative from them, liberal democracy must knock sense into the heads of short-sighted and unrepentant feudal landlords* and implement, without fear or favour, a radical and rational, as opposed to the Communists' irrational and sectional, solution of the land problem. The ability of a living democracy to devise a just solution and deliver the goods with expedition may

also have the effect of bringing round Communists to a realisation of the potentialities of peaceful and constitutional change. It would be well for democrats to remember that the Communists' dogma of inevitable revolution is born of their disillusionment with the leisurely and dilatory processes of liberal democracy. To allow oneself, on the other hand, to be frightened by their electoral victories is the height of folly in the present situation. To realise that the land problem is the greatest single challenge to democratic conscience is itself no mean progress. The Communists come only incidentally, although force-

fully, into the picture. Such crucial issues as concern land, food, work and culture for people who have insufficient quantities or none at all of these, would still be there even if there were no Communists. Propertied interests would do well to recognise them even in their present insensate mood of anti-Communist hysteria and, recognising them, to strive honestly for their solution by gracefully surrendering a sizeable part of their fortune and privilege. Let it not be said of them that God deprives those of reason whom He wishes to destroy.

THE AUTHOR

* Who, exploiting the Government's continuous obsession with the anxious food problem, systematically torpedoed all reasonable and moderate proposals of reform in the last three years on the plausible plea that nothing should be done to jeopardise the possible increase in production, but who, at the same time, without doing anything to maximise food production, nevertheless insistently demanded, in its name, and got higher prices for the grain surpluses they sold to the Government's procurement and rationing machinery. (See also Appendix.)

COMMUNIST SPOTLIGHT

ON THE

LAND PROBLEM

IT is a truism that the land problem has always been acute in Madras State as elsewhere in India and that an agrarian revolution involving radical changes in the structure of land tenure and of farming has been long overdue. The Chinese agrarian revolution under Communists' inspiration and direction, admittedly resulting in redistribution of lands in favour of landless peasants and labourers, is bound to aggravate the situation, sooner

or later in our own country. But most of our liberal democratic leaders, with their astounding complacency, still remain impervious to the lesson of the Chinese Civil War that land reforms in the hands of Communists are as powerful as bullets. Among our national leaders, Sri Jawaharlal Nehru alone has repeatedly emphasised that only a solution of the acute problem of land-ownership will constitute the major key to Asia's future.

REFORM HOPES BELIED

BUT the fond hope of pacifist agrarian reformers that, as the Gandhian emphasis on rural regeneration had become a living tradition with the Congress Party, it might be expected to direct the wave of agrarian unrest into peaceful constructive channels by timely action, has not so far been fulfilled.* Even the abolition, with compensation, of Zamindaris, which constitutes only the first step towards the objective of eliminating all intermediaries between the State and the tiller, is yet to be expedited in most of India barring Madras State. The Report of the Agrarian Reforms Committee, popularly known as the Kumarappa Committee, has not so far been taken up for serious consideration by the Congress Working Committee. The Committee's key recommendation of putting a ceiling on existing holdings in individual ownership has already

been rejected by the Congress Economic Planning Sub-Committee and the Planning Commission.

Here in Madras, an official committee which went into the related questions of land revenue reorganisation and land tenure reform has rejected most of the important recommendations of the Kumarappa Committee in respect of maximum limit to existing holdings, determining the size of economic holding for the various regions, definition of cultivator, conferment of occupancy rights on cultivating tenants, abolition of absentee landlordism, etc. The only three important recommendations of the Madras Committee are in respect of future acquisition of land by individuals, alienation of agricultural land to non-cultivators, and fair rents for tenants. But the Government here have not committed themselves to implementing even the limited conservative reforms proposed by the Committee. Likewise, Gov-

* Acharya Vinoba Bhave has since initiated his *Bhoodan Yagna* (Land Gift Mission). This movement at the non-governmental level is typically Gandhian in conception and is yet to gather momentum. As the Gandhian approach rules out expropriation of private property by governmental or popular force or coercion but expects voluntary surrender by landlords of a part of their landed wealth in favour of the landless peasants, it remains to be seen how far enlightened self-interest will guide the actions of the possessing classes in our rural areas. However, not a few are of the view that the final results of the Acharya's noble Mission will fall far short of the requirements of the agrarian situation.

ernment efforts in the direction of effecting a fair distribution of agricultural income by fair rents and fair minimum wages so as to secure for the tenant and the labourer larger shares thereof are making only tardy progress here as elsewhere in India.

But, at the same time, landless tenants and labourers have come to entertain exaggerated hopes thanks to the wide propagation of the slogan "land to the tiller" following years of agitation by the Congress, Socialist and Communist parties, while landlords, moved by equally exaggerated fears, have become increasingly aggressive and are out to resist and sabotage even moderate reforms in land tenure, ignoring ostrich-like the current trends in backward agricultural economies of the Far East. In this explosive situation the rather vague promise of agrarian reforms contained in the Congress Election Manifesto has been taken advantage of by the Communist Party which has placed in the forefront of its election platform the promise of 'handing over landlords' lands to the peasants and agricultural labourers, without payment'—a promise which, even if it does not bring them an electoral majority, may at least succeed in accentuating the tension that already prevails in some form or other in several of our rural areas. It is with this agrarian tension that I am next concerned.

ROOTS OF AGRARIAN TENSION

IT is well known that the post-war period has seen acute agrarian tension in many significant areas of the Madras State like Malabar, Tanjore, Krishna, Godavari and Guntur districts where paddy is predominantly grown. The roots of this tension are at once psychological and economic—psychological in so far as tension is caused, promoted and sustained by suppressed desires and aspirations, jealousies and hatreds, false hopes and wild promises, and a sheer exhaustion of that traditional psychic capacity to put up with abject poverty and indigence on the part of landless tenants, labourers and artisans on the one hand, and contempt for the lowly and the wretched, and insensate fear and resultant hatred of the haves on the part of privileged sections in rural areas on the other; economic in so far as tension is caused, promoted and sustained by such factors as inequitable distribution of lands in private ownership, high competitive rents and tenant-squeezing, debt slavery, low wages, bad conditions of living etc. Although the kind of tension that prevails among agrarian groups is in large measure determined by the economic circumstances of peasants, a determined attack on the economic side alone might

not wholly eradicate the psychological factors making for tension. Still the economic factors are the dominant ones and therefore require a little elaboration.

The agrarian situation in the entire Madras State may be summed up in a few sets of intelligible figures. The outstanding fact of the State's agrarian economy is that owner-farmers constitute roughly 55 to 60 per cent of ryotwari landowners, while absentee owners constituting roughly 15 per cent lease out their lands. The remaining 25 to 30 per cent also rent out their lands to tenants.

The total cultivated area under the ryotwari tenure in the entire State is 276 lakhs acres distributed among 72 lakhs registered landowners. Seventy lakhs of them are small-holders coming under the land revenue assessment bracket of Rs. 50 and below. They have 31 lakhs acres of wet lands irrigated by Government works and 185 lakhs acres under dry cultivation. The more distressing fact is that of these 70 lakhs of smallholders, no less than 56 lakhs are sub-marginal holders coming within the land revenue assessment bracket of Rs. 10/- and below and owning just 11 lakhs acres of wet and 102 lakhs acres of dry lands. On the other hand, 2 lakhs of registered owners coming under the land revenue assessment bracket

of above Rs. 50/- have 22 lakhs acres of wet lands irrigated by Government works and 38 lakhs acres under dry assessment.

In terms of percentages, smallholders who constitute 97 per cent have 59 per cent and big holders who constitute 3 per cent have as much as 41 per cent of all wet lands with assured water supply. On the other hand, smallholders have as much as 83 per cent and big holders 17 per cent of all dry lands.

In respect of Zamindari areas now being converted into ryotwari tenure a similar pattern of distribution of land may be assumed in the absence of figures on the basis of which more exact percentage figures can be worked out.

My calculations based on the latest available land revenue settlement figures, those of the year 1945-46, do not take into account the visible effects of post-war inflation which has made the rich richer and the poor poorer. Here due weight should be given to the fact that since 1945-46 there has been a pronounced redistribution of income in favour of upper land-owning groups with most of the net benefit flowing from higher prices for primary produce, especially foodgrains, going to bigger landholders with larger marketable surpluses to sell. This has undoubtedly resulted in further

concentration of landed property, and of more fertile lands at that, in the hands of bigger landlords. Larger returns from cash and garden crops have also helped this trend. It is no wonder that the period since 1945 has also seen acute tension in all the significant districts where tenant demand for land is highly competitive and where the pressure of population on cultivated land is equally high.

Dr. V. V. Sayana of Bombay University who has made a pioneer study of land transfers in Madras State has also confirmed the trends discernible since 1945 of concentration of a relatively larger percentage of land in the hands of a relatively smaller percentage of big landholders. According to him, lands held by agricultural labourers, small ryots, artisan classes and also people holding petty employments have been going to others who mostly happen to be moneylenders, traders and businessmen. In terms of caste, land has been rapidly passing from the Brahmins, the artisans and the Harijans. Another trend has been the transfer of land from the residential to the non-residential landowners. "The most striking feature," observes Dr. Sayana, "is that the rate at which land is passing off from the groups of small economic status to those of big economic standing is almost in the aggregate more than twice the rate at which

land is passing off in the opposite direction, namely, from the big to the small." "This process of 'swallowing up' is found to be the common phenomenon in many parts of the State," concludes Dr. Sayana.

EXTENT OF LAND HUNGER

THE above background is intended to emphasise that post-war agrarian tension, alternately submerged and coming to the surface, sometimes subdued sometimes taking a violent turn, has spotlighted the acute land problem which, in its basic aspects, is largely an economic problem. For it is a chronic feature of our populous districts with a strikingly high man-land ratio that cultivated and cultivable lands are so woefully scarce in relation to the compelling demands for their ownership, ownership and cultivation or merely cultivation that there are large unsatisfied demands for land. This, in short, is the phenomenon of land hunger which term should comprehend not only the large unsatisfied demands for land but also the acute competition among land - owning non - cultivating, land-owning cultivating and landless cultivating sections. The term 'land hunger,' which is usually defined as 'the urge of tenant-farmers to own the land they till,' is here defined in a broader way to include the urge

of sub-marginal and uneconomic owners, who are also part-tenants, for owning more land which they can themselves cultivate. A rough idea of the extent

of land hunger, though not of its intensity, may be obtained from the following table I have constructed with the help of available basic figures :—

Distribution of Ryotwari Land in Madras State

Range of Extent in acres	Number of Registered Owners in lakhs	Number in each group as a percentage of the total	Extent of land owned in lakh acres	Extent of land owned by each group expressed as a percentage of the total	Simple average size of holding in acres	Wet portion of average holding in acres
Below 1 acre	16.4	22.8%	9.5	3.4%	0.58	0.07
1—3 acres	39.7	55.1%	104.3	37.8%	2.6	0.2
3—9 —	11.2	15.6%	75.0	27.2%	6.7	1.2
9—12 —	2.7	3.8%	28.3	10.2%	10.7	2.8
12—18 —	1.4	1.9%	23.4	8.3%	16.7	5.1
18—50 —	0.46	0.6%	16.9	6.2%	42.0	16.0
Above 50 —	0.14	0.2%	18.9	6.9%	134.0	55.0

- N. B. :—**(1) Nearly six million landless tenants and labourers are dependent on these very lands for their work and livelihood.
- (2) Roughly 55 to 60 per cent of all ryotwari landowners are owner-farmers cultivating marginal and sub-marginal holdings.
- (3) At the present rate of yield, nearly 0.4 acre of land cultivated by 'wet rice' methods would be required to produce enough rice for a whole year's consumption on the basis of 12 ounces per head per day. The extent of land required for a family of four would be 1.5 acres.
- (4) This minimum extent of 1.5 acres is, however, distinct from an economic holding for which a size of 5 acres of wet land is generally suggested in Madras State.

COMMUNISTS' ROLE

FROM the table of distribution of ryotwari land in the entire Madras State given above, the conclusion may be appropriately drawn that 93.5 per cent of landholders own 68.4 per cent

and 6.5 per cent of landholders own as much as 31.6 per cent of all cultivated lands. But these relative figures conceal a more pronounced maldistribution of lands of which a relatively larger proportion is under wet assessment, in the six districts of

Malabar, Tanjore, Guntur, Krishna, East Godavari and West Godavari which have seen acute agrarian tension in recent years and where, significantly, Communist organisation and agitation has been at its best. The combined situation in these six districts is that 90.3 per cent of landholders own just 52.3 per cent and 9.7 per cent of landholders own as much as 47.7 per cent of all cultivated lands under ryotwari tenure. Herein

lies the organic connection between the prevailing distribution of land with a relatively larger percentage of landless tenants and labourers pressing on it than in other districts and the boldness of the Communist Party in preparing to set up candidates for the forthcoming elections in almost all the rural constituencies of these districts. All this may, to some extent, be inferred from the following tables :

Distribution of Ryotwari Land in Six Districts

Range of Extent in acres	Number of Registered Owners in lakhs	Number in each group as a percentage of the total	Extent of land owned in lakh acres	Extent of land owned by each group expressed as a percentage of the total	Simple average size of holding in acres	Wet portion of average holding in acres
Below 1 acre	5.0	24.0%	1.62	2.5%	0.32	0.06
1—3 acres	10.0	48.0%	15.1	23.3%	1.5	0.3
3—9 —	3.8	18.3%	17.2	26.5%	4.5	1.4
9—12 —	1.1	5.3%	8.1	12.5%	7.4	3.0
12—18 —	0.6	2.9%	7.6	11.7%	12.7	5.6
18—50 —	0.22	1.1%	6.2	9.6%	28.2	14.6
Above 50 —	0.08	0.4%	9.0	13.9%	112.5	61.8

* The reader is reminded that this was written by about the middle of October, 1951. Election returns for the said six districts covering a total of 106 seats in the 375-member Madras Assembly show that the Communists and their known allies have captured 63 seats, while the Socialist Party, also swearing by land reform, has annexed 4 seats. The Congress Party, on the other hand, has won only 24 seats in the six districts together. District-wise, the Congress has captured 4 out of 29 in Malabar, 9 out of 19 in Tanjore, 4 out of 16 in East Godavari, 2 out of 12 in Krishna, 3 out of 18 in Guntur and 2 out of 12 in West Godavari.

Distribution of Ryotwari Land in Tanjore District and in Three Representative Villages of that District.

	Tanjore Dt. as a whole.	Three villages together.
I. <i>Number in each group of registered land-owners as a percentage of the total :—</i>		
(1) Sub-marginal group (Below 9 acres) ...	89.8%	88.9%
(2) Near-marginal and marginal (9—18 acres)	7.8%	8.8%
(3) Supra-marginal group (Above 18 acres)...	2.4%	2.8%
II. <i>Extent of land owned by each group as a percentage of the total :—</i>		
(1) Sub-marginal group ...	42.1%	37.4%
(2) Near-marginal group ...	21.3%	23.6%
(3) Supra-marginal group ...	36.6%	39.0%
III. <i>Average size of holding :—</i>	2.61 acres	2.21 acres

But is it not also clear from the above tables that any kind of land reform aimed at equal distribution of lands after expropriation cannot provide all those now cultivating them as owner-farmers, tenants, or permanent or temporary farm-servants with peasant farms of an adequate economic size which in Madras State is commonly suggested as 5 acres of wet or 10 acres of dry land? If the object of such redistribution is, as it ought to be if it is to be sound and rational, the creation of economic holdings

owned by the tillers themselves, what sense is there in a process of revolutionary expropriation which will most definitely lead to bloodshed and chaos without the saving feature of any rational objective being achieved? The usual proposal of agrarian reformers to limit the existing holdings and acquire the surplus lands for redistribution may not also appear expedient or realistic in the present situation which demands a line of approach consistent with the objective of increasing food production. The

Planning Commission, too, has expressed the opinion that "any large-scale and sudden attempt to break up existing holdings may give rise to such organised forces of disruption as may make it extremely difficult to bring about the very transformation in the organisation of agriculture which is needed."

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY MUST DO IT

NONE of these rational and realistic arguments, however, may weigh with the Communists whose assiduity in creating mischief in this sphere is likely to bring them reward sooner or later.* For, the primary aim of typical agrarian reform as promised or practised by Communists, who have found in it the master-key to success in their relentless struggle for political power in a number of countries, is to break up large estates and create new small farms or holdings, however uneconomic they may be. Theirs is a political approach to an economic problem; when once

they are securely in power they will set a different goal for the agrarian economy, namely, collectivisation for increasing per acre and/or per capita productivity both of which are bound to be low in small uneconomic peasant farms. So, in a country where large-scale capitalistic farming, prosperous peasant proprietorship and state farming are alike ruled out as unrealistic and impracticable by all careful students of agrarian problems, the only alternative is to adopt a democratic variant of what the Communists would in any case do if ever they were to come to power on their own strength and remain there for ever. If a liberal democratic government cannot do even that, there is the grave risk that liberal democracy itself might one day go under in our country in a bloody orgy of self-defeating revolution raising more problems than it solves or can solve. Rational as this prognostication is, it should serve to put the thing in a new light. Perhaps the Planning Commission itself has this in mind when it confidently says that "it is possible within the framework of a living democracy, to achieve

* Even the fact of their having reaped a rich harvest in all the significant districts of Madras State so soon as in the present General Elections has come as a surprise to none except the purblind. There is a disposition in some quarters to explain away the Communist gains as something fortuitous. It would, however, be nearer the truth to say that it is the inevitable result of that corroding process of social disorganisation which has afflicted numerically large agrarian groups in recent years.

the changes" by way of an ultimate programme of co-operative village management.

Prof. G. D. H. Cole's pregnant observations in this connection would bear repetition. He says: "In the longer run it seems sufficiently plain that the best hope for Indian agriculture does lie in extensive measures of collectivisation more or less on Russian lines so as to substitute what will be in effect inclusive rural co-operative societies embracing entire villages for the forms of peasant cultivation at present in use."

Prof. P. N. Driver, who has to-date put forward the best case against peasant proprietorship, says almost the same thing. After an exhaustive examination of the close relation between land tenure and agricultural productivity in our own time of relative over-population, he proves conclusively that, as the total land available is much less than necessary for a proper redistribution in the form of prosperous individualistic peasant farms, complete abolition of private property in land and institution of co-operative collective farming are the only possible panacea for all the rural, in fact the country's, ills.

Prof. Raymond Firth, who has made a careful study of agrarian problems in South-East Asia

where the basic conditions are comparable to ours, has confirmed that "even if all inequalities in distribution were severely rectified, by cancellation of rural indebtedness, expropriation of landlords, levelling down of richer peasants by sharing of their capital, and substitution of a co-operative marketing system, this could only give a temporary raising of peasant standards. The basic problem is not simply unequal distribution, but poverty, and a value system not well adapted to the requirements of modern technological change."

Even Sir Malcolm Darling, who had an intimate knowledge of Indian agrarian conditions, expressed the definite opinion, in spite of his cautious reference to the peasant's attachment to his tiny holdings and tinier strips and to his resistance even to consolidation of the latter, that collective farming could well be tried on at least a part of the 100 million acres of culturable, though not actually cultivated, lands provided water could be found for irrigation. The cautious opinion of Sir Malcolm Darling only underlines the need for a few years of sustained propaganda to convince our small proprietors and tenants that it is not economical to keep on clinging to their tiny ancestral holdings or to cultivate new occupancy holdings which are bound to be uneconomic.

At the same time agrarian reformers, who have seized upon the phenomenon of land hunger to propagate the related slogans of 'land to the tiller,' 'equitable re-distribution of lands' and 'land for the landless' and to assiduously influence the evolution of a policy for establishing a system of peasant proprietorship, would do well to examine the nature of that phenomenon more closely. If they do, they may realise that they have mistakenly taken land hunger as a purely economic phenomenon in the sense of a uniformly prevalent economic desire on the part of tillers to own the land they till. They may also find that, while the land problem as such is an economic problem, its most prominent manifestation, namely, land hunger, is not a purely economic phenomenon. For, if there are tillers who intensely desire to own the land for the economic consideration of larger returns which, in their estimation, they are likely to get, there are also tillers who with equal intensity desire to own the land for such non-economic considerations as pride of possessing land, equality in status with some land-owning sections, psychological feeling of security associated with landed property etc. There are again some tillers

who quail from the responsibilities of ownership and who are interested only in secure cultivation of some land or other for a living. Besides, there are instances of tenant-cultivators who are more prosperous than peasant proprietors. There are again numerous tenants-at-will and labourers without any tradition, sense or consciousness of land-ownership, many of whom are perhaps interested only in larger returns for work turned out on the farm, but some at least of whom have been fortuitously led by agitators to entertain desires for land. What is more, if land hunger has been so real, so extensive and so intense, nothing could have prevented the landless peasants from launching out on any large-scale movement for land grabbing. While this does not rule out the possibility of some such movement, aided by the stimulus of organised agitation in future,* at the moment it certainly speaks for the pacific qualities of our landless peasants.

It is on this pacific character of our peasantry that a democratic government should rely for weaning them away from the influence of agitators who mislead them into believing that an owned holding, tiny though it be,

* The very electoral success of Communist candidates in a number of rural constituencies of the six significant districts is likely to have the effect of stimulating some such movement as in Telengana.

will raise the standard of living of the tiller. If the possible economic disasters of ordinary peasant proprietorship in our agrarian conditions are brought home to the landless peasants, the ground will have been largely cleared for co-operative collective farming, or co-operative village management as visualised by the Planning Commission, in the present democratic set-up itself.

TOWARDS CO-OPERATIVE FARMING

HERE the Planning Commission's ultimate programme acquires an importance all its own. There is no doubt it is well designed to establish a system of Co-operative Village Management without provoking widespread agrarian resistance. Under this programme, the unit of land management will be the entire area of the village, all the land therein being regarded as a single farm. Rights of ownership will be recognised and compensated for through an ownership dividend to be paid at each harvest. Management of the land and the resources of the village will be organised so as to provide maximum employment. Owners of land who work in the village and workers who are non-owners will receive re-

muneration for work done according to the nature of the work. Owners will also receive an additional return on account of their ownership rights. The land may be cultivated by individual families or groups of families according as the needs of cultivation and other local circumstances suggest. For the purpose of cultivation appropriate blocks may be constituted and allotted by the village management body. These blocks will be held from the village management on such terms and conditions as will provide suitable incentives to those holding the blocks. The system may be introduced in any village when at least two-thirds of the owners or permanent tenants holding not less than one-half the cultivated area of the village express their preference in favour of its adoption. In such an event, the system would apply to the entire area of the village, including that held by the minority. Enabling legislation for the system should be enacted in States.

The chief merit of the programme is that, by separating ownership from management, it makes it possible to use the land wholly in the interest of the community. This kind of pooling individual holdings for increasing productivity does not involve collective ownership of land in a village or nationalisation of peasant rights. As any system

of prosperous peasant proprietorship is unthinkable in our conditions and as small and uneconomic holdings stand in the way of rapid advance in agricultural production, the Planning Commission emphasises that "the line of advance should be co-operative farming with the objective of making the whole or a substantial part of a village, a unit of co-operative management." Although measures of protection for tenants-at-will in ryotwari areas and sub-tenants in zamindari areas are changes in the land system from the point of view of sectional interests only, the Commission further emphasises, it would be good to have, without prejudice to protective legislation in respect of eviction, duration of leases, fair rents, tenant-purchase and ceiling on future acquisition of land, an agreed pattern of reconstruction "in the direction of an increasing measure of social justice." The Planning Commission's immediate programme consisting of three main proposals—namely, village production councils for framing programmes of production to be achieved at each harvest by the village, registered farms for adopting scientific methods of farming and co-operative farming societies wherever possible—does not, however, countenance any limitation on the size of existing holdings and consequent break-up of big landed estates.

UNDO THE MISCHIEF

BUT, as a lot of mischief has already been done and will be done in the course of election campaigns by the agitation for land to the tiller, it is necessary to effect forthwith a psychological change in the rural atmosphere by a bold measure such as the placing of a ceiling on individual landownership. If all present large holdings are statutorily limited to, say, 30 acres of wet land apiece and if the cultivating tenants or permanent farm servants on the surplus lands are granted permanent and heritable cultivation rights without the rights of transfer, sub-letting or mortgage but with provision for eviction only in cases of non-payment of fair rent, and if at the same time the landlord's rights and responsibilities are respectively restricted to a mere heritable, but not transferable, six-year claim on the tenant for a fair rent of one-third of the gross produce and to payment of land revenue as usual to Government, peasants as a whole may come to appreciate that the Government have a higher purpose in not taking up any haphazard and unscientific programme of redistribution of lands.

Considered from this radical point of view, the recommendation of the Madras Land Reforms Committee in respect of a rather generous maximum limit

on future acquisitions of land by individuals can only be called conservative. The relevant recommendation is that no person should be allowed in future to acquire agricultural lands, if he already has a holding carrying an assessment of Rs. 250/-, or so as to constitute a holding carrying an assessment of more than Rs. 250/-. This limit would broadly represent an extent of 50 acres of wet or 100 acres of dry land, that is ten times the size that is generally suggested in Madras State for an economic holding. It has not struck the Committee that **malafide** partition of landed properties which at present are bigger than the maximum, might enable the several sharers to acquire new lands upto the limit recommended. As existing large holdings are specifically exempted from the maximum limit, the very limited aim of checking concentration of land in individual hands in future might only result in a fairer distribution of ownership among those belonging to the upper strata of landholders, but not in any transfer of ownership to the lower strata. In any case the various exemptions from the maximum limit taken together are hardly calculated to change the existing conditions favouring maldistribution of land. At the same time the very broad definition of 'cultivator' that the Committee has given would render the suggested prohibition of alienation of land

to non-cultivators practically nugatory. Thirdly, the recommended fair rent of 40 to 45 per cent of the gross produce for the landlord would mean as much as 60 to 65 per cent of the entire net income from the holding he owns, the balance of 35 to 40 per cent going to the tenant who tills it. This is something which is not likely to enthuse the actual tiller.

As these recommendations of the Madras Committee are, by all accounts, conservative, a slightly radical but simple programme I have outlined above, involving little risk and no compensation payment by the State but only by the tenant in the form of fair rent for a period of, say, 6 years after which he becomes a full owner, might ensure a short period of agrarian peace. During this period all large temple and institutional holdings embracing entire villages may be converted into efficient co-operative farms which then might serve as so many models backing up an intensive educative propaganda for co-operative farming on a wider scale later. This preparatory period may very well be utilised for under-taking a more diligent study of the land problem in all its bewildering complexity and for widely propagating the results of such study, such that agrarian reformers, in the absence of adequate data, might have no chance of prescribing

ill-prepared nostrums for all the real and imaginary ills of the peasantry and thereby accentuating the tension that already prevails.

MORE STATISTICAL STUDIES WANTED

EVEN Communists who have been assiduously exploiting the land problem to enlist peasant support must remember that it is not something which involves questions of ownership and tenant rights alone. It is in fact a multi-faced problem requiring a series of statistical investigations on state-wide and country-wide scales—investigations of a kind necessarily involving considerable labour and expense. In the context of widely-suggested agrarian reforms it has several other aspects requiring careful study. The only country-wide statistical enquiry of the Union Government, that into agricultural labour conditions and wages, is only just nearing completion. The Reserve Bank of India has already initiated its rural credit surveys. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research has probably taken up surveys of cost of production of crops. The following is an illustrative list of problems and subjects about which reliable statistical data are being or have to be obtained if the land problem is to be solved in the light of real facts and with a minimum of real cost in

terms of human misery and suffering:—

Farm income; cost of production of crops; expenses of cultivation; sizes of owner-tilled, tenant-cultivated and part-owned part-rented holdings; area under tenant-cultivation; level of agricultural incomes; cost and standard of living of agricultural classes and their expenditure patterns; income and expenditure of bigger landholders; the extent of enforced unemployment amongst different strata of agricultural population; the extent of rural indebtedness and the effect of rise in prices on various sectors of agricultural economy; the financial requirements of various classes of agriculturists and how they are met; the extent of rural savings and investment; agricultural wages; agricultural leases and rents covering sub-tenants and tenants-at-will in zamindari and ryotwari areas respectively; prevailing pattern of distribution of land in zamindari areas converted now into ryotwari; incidence of agricultural taxation; quantum of social welfare or loss likely to result from abolition of absentee landlordism and conferment of occupancy rights on cultivating tenants; comparative merits and feasibility or otherwise of co-operative joint farming of uneconomic holdings and that of economic holdings, etc.

Enquiries into these related aspects of the land problem may

have to be taken up more or less simultaneously, co-ordinated preferably by a statutory Board of Economic Enquiry and carried out with the utmost speed so that they may not degenerate into leisurely and time-consuming devices holding up reform.

DEMOCRAT'S DILEMMA

TIME is also of the very essence in the implementation of the suggested or other similar radical measures. But the question is: can liberal democracy act swiftly before the sands run out? The answer should be in the negative if liberal democracy involves the acceptance of the economic status quo with its corollary in inviolate property rights. Here a conscientious liberal democrat may well recall J. S. Mill, the author of "Liberty," who wrote exactly a century ago in his "Principles of Political Economy," the following celebrated passage on Communism: "If the choice were to be made between Communism with all its chances, and the present (1852) state of society with all its sufferings and injustices; if the institution of private property necessarily carried with it as a consequence, that the produce of labour should be apportioned as we

now see it, almost in an inverse ratio to the labour . . . if this or Communism were the alternative, all the difficulties, great or small, of Communism would be but as dust in the balance." But fundamentally Mill was a faithful adherent of the capitalist system as his initial devotion to Communism was more emotional than rational, while at the same time defence of liberal democracy involved then, as it does now in all non-Communist democracies including India, the acceptance of the economic status quo in all its fundamentals.

If such a democrat takes a global view of both Capitalism and Communism today, he may not fail to observe that since Mill's time the sufferings and injustices of Capitalism have increased in volume and intensity alike even as the difficulties of Communism have multiplied in equal measure. He may also find that what Mill wrote about nineteenth century Capitalism is applicable in its entirety to the present-day exploitative landlordism in India. And he may rightly feel, despite the threatening catastrophe in the shape of a violent agrarian revolution under Communist inspiration and direction,* that while he has

* We are already in the first (peaceful although exciting) stage of this evolution as the results of General Elections in Madras, Travancore, Cochin and Hyderabad show. That the Communists should have set in motion the ball of evolution in a manner not entirely unexpected by some careful observers of alike visible and incipient trends in our rural areas, has administered a rude shock to democratic complacency.

no easy choice in the matter he is also under no moral obligation to defend liberal democracy unless, of course, it acquires a dynamic and radical character and an equally dynamic and progressive leadership under the inevitable pressure of circumstances.

APPENDIX

LANDLORDS' PRESSURE AND GOVERNMENT'S FOLLY

AT no time during the last four years did it occur to the Madras Government that it could usefully employ the sampling technique of public opinion polls to know whether its actions were meeting with public approval and thus to bridge, as far as possible, the gap between what the adult citizen at any given moment thought and what his government did. At the non-official level, this writer's efforts in the T.N.C.C. Research Department to organise a centre to ascertain roughly from time to time public opinion regarding the Congress Party's policies, promises and performance and its hold on the electorate also ended in failure. In the absence of reliable methods of ascertaining public opinion, the Government here, whenever they brought forward reform proposals which they later withdrew, were invariably

taken in by a spurious kind of "public opinion" consisting of whole columns reporting landlord associations' proceedings and highly-coloured, one-sided and interested editorials in some powerful newspapers and of the preconceived notions of individual legislators who were blissfully ignorant of the trends in their constituencies. In the result we witnessed during the last few years the depressing spectacle of a government re-creating in the face of organised opposition by landlords who were shrewd enough to get it mirrored in the Press as "public opinion" --something which could be more aptly described as inspired blackmail.

When the big, bloated landlords of delta districts described the Kumarappa Committee's agrarian reform proposals as "communistic, expropriatory and confiscatory" the Government readily saw the "point" and appointed an official committee to go over the same ground. When this official committee, after rejecting all the crucial recommendations of the Kumarappa Committee, outlined instead some conservative reforms in land tenure and land taxation, they too were roundly condemned by the same landlords, and the Government, in deference to "public opinion", took no definite decision on the Reform Report. It was the same story when the Government

brought forward an Agricultural Bill to deal firmly with the chronically indifferent landowners and make agricultural production more efficient, but it too was quietly put in cold storage because the landlords did not want it. Similarly, proposals for levying surcharges on the revenue assessments of bigger landholdings and of lands growing commercial and plantation crops and betterment taxes on lands benefiting by new irrigation projects were all as surprisingly withdrawn as they were introduced. The proposed Assembly resolution empowering the Union Government to enact suitable legislation for levying estate duties for the benefit of this State also fared no better. Thus the Government, in their infinite solicitude for the poor, suffering land barons, invariably bowed to "public opinion" and the landlords invariably succeeded in killing what they did not like.

But, curiously enough, the landlords could always get what they wanted. When, in the name of agrarian peace, they demanded of the Government large security forces, these were readily despatched to the "troubled" areas. And the landlords, comfortably placed as they were behind a security curtain, wreaked their vengeance on the "wretched" tenants and labourers who had the "audacity" to ask for larger crop-

shares and better wages. On the other hand, not being such simple-minded fools as to own that what was sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander, the landlords never ceased to ask for higher prices for their marketable surpluses of paddy. And the Government, for their part, suitably responded to their "just" refrain by increasing paddy procurement prices on at least two occasions during the last four years. That the most recent demand for higher paddy prices had neither economic nor moral justification is forcibly brought out in the following note which brings under one compass the related problems of land-ownership, food production and prices particularly in those districts where acute agrarian tension has prevailed in recent years.

NOTE ON PROCUREMENT PRICES

(Prepared in October, '51)

"The Madras Food Minister has tried to make out a case for higher procurement prices for paddy on the ground that the prices in Madras are lower than those in some other States, that enhanced prices would prevent the diversion of land from food to cash crops, that better prices would bring out more stocks for

NOTE ON PROCUREMENT PRICES

controlled distribution, and that such prices might be an incentive to landholders to increase the acreage under food crops, especially paddy. There are, however, some solid facts which totally belie this contention.

"Firstly, comparison of Madras paddy prices with prices elsewhere is not quite relevant, for conditions of cultivation and agricultural costs may and do vary in different States. Even supposing, as a Union Minister recently said, that procurement prices are not based on costs of production, there is no reason why an attempt should not be made to find out, in however rough-and-ready a manner, whether the present prices fully cover agricultural costs embracing cost of living and cost of cultivation.

"It is well known that the demand for higher prices for paddy is virtually a demand by the big Tanjore mirasdars. Calculations done with the help of some farm accounts collected by me reveal the following position in that District. (I may add in parenthesis that a number of landlords including a member of the Land Revenue Reforms Committee told me that these accounts were not unfair to them and that they represented, more or less correctly, the real state of farm business.)

"Cultivation costs average Rs. 125 per acre, while net in-

come averages Rs. 105 per acre of wet land. The cost per kalam of 24 Madras measures or 62 lbs. of gross produce works out to Rs. 3-3, on an average, while the net income works out to 8½ per cent. on the average market value of an acre of wet land and nearly 35 per cent. on the pre-war value of the same land. Actual costs of cultivation (as distinct from agricultural costs taking cost of living and cost of cultivation together) constitute 55 per cent. of the present paddy price while the remaining 45 per cent. constitutes the landholder's net income. Paddy price has increased to nearly five times the depression price and the net income of the bigger landholder to six times the 1933-38 level, while agricultural costs have increased to a little more than four times the former level of costs. The Madras Land Revenue Reforms Committee has taken the present net income of the landowner to be eight times the revenue assessment. This is a rather cautious and conservative estimate, for there is a case for taking it to be 12 times the assessment.

"Although, superficially speaking, any increase in paddy prices would appear to effect an increase in the incomes of all landholders, in reality only a small minority of mirasdars and non-cultivating lessees having large or considerable marketable sur-

pluses stand to benefit. Any such increase, therefore, can only have the effect of enriching a few at the expense of the many. This point was more or less conclusively proved by me in March and April last in the course of a press controversy.

(Vide issues of "The Hindu" of March 11, 18, 23 and 30 and April 5 and 7, 1951). Still, to clinch the issue, I give below a table I have constructed out of the basic figures found in the Land Revenue Settlement Report.

Range of Extent in acres	Number of registered owners in lakhs.	Simple average size of holding in acres.	Wet portion of the average holding
Below 1 acre ...	16.4 ...	0.58 ...	0.07
1 — 3 acres ...	39.7 ...	2.6 ...	0.2
3 — 9 ...	11.2 ...	6.7 ...	1.2
9 — 12 ...	2.7 ...	10.7 ...	2.8
12 — 18 ...	1.4 ...	16.7 ...	5.1
18 — 50 ...	0.4 ...	42.0 ...	16.0
Above 50 acres ...	0.2 ...	131.0 ...	55.0

N. B.—At the present rate of yield, nearly 0.4 acre of land cultivated by 'wet rice' methods would be required to produce enough rice for a whole year's consumption on the basis of 12 oz. per head per day. The extent of land required for a family of four would be 1.5 acres. This latter figure of 1.5 acres is, however, distinct from an economic holding for which a size of 5 acres of wet land is generally suggested in Madras State.

A rough idea may be obtained of the quantum of *real* marketable surplus available with landholders owning more than 9 acres apiece. This *real* surplus is distinct from the distress sale of paddy with or without a premium on the control price and its later repurchase at a higher price for consumption by a varying section of landholders owning less than 9 acres apiece.

"That better prices would bring out more stocks for procurement and controlled distribution is also an untenable argument. Where do these stocks which elude procurement go now? Obviously to the black-market. It is well known that

black market prices even in a surplus district like Tanjore are nearly double or at least 75 per cent. more than the procurement prices. Surely procurement prices cannot be increased to the level of black market prices and thus to the extent of weaning some

of the landholders away from the practice of selling at a premium which they have assiduously cultivated over a period of five years. With such of those as divert paddy to the blackmarket the practice has come to stay, and no increase in procurement prices can, therefore, have the effect of countering this diversion of stocks to the blackmarket. The only discernible motive behind the agitation for higher prices is to get larger returns on that portion of the surplus of bigger landholders which, in any case, cannot elude procurement.

"The argument that higher prices will have the effect of preventing the diversion of land from food to cash crops cannot also hold water. Such diversion, if found to be really pronounced and widespread, can certainly be prevented by other suitable measures of regulation. As cash crops are more profitable (as evidenced by the surcharges on assessment of lands under them recommended by the Land Revenue Reforms Committee) no increase in paddy prices can be sufficiently large to counter this diversion if it does really take place at all. Here official figures themselves, on which one would expect official policy to be based, tell a different story. The following calculations are made with the help of the latest available "Season and Crop Report" of the Madras Government.

There has occurred a 3.2 per cent fall in the acreage under all food crops from the 1943-47 average in the entire Madras State, while the fall in respect of all non-food crops is 1.8 per cent. In the six predominantly paddy-growing districts of East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Nellore and Tanjore where there has been intensive procurement at official prices all these years, there has occurred a 3.2 per cent increase on the 1943-47 normal of paddy acreage in particular. At the same time, the acreage under all food crops in the said six districts has increased by 2.6 per cent, while that under non-food crops in the same districts has fallen by 5.9 per cent. In these circumstances, lower procurement may have to be largely attributed to a fall in acre-yield of paddy. This is also confirmed by the 22.3 per cent and 21.2 per cent fall in average acre-yield of irrigated and unirrigated paddy respectively from the 1919 normals in those districts. It should also be remembered that smallholders who constitute the overwhelming majority of landholders could scarcely risk putting their lands to other than paddy and food crops at a time of critical food shortage of which they are aware only too well. Their natural instinct of self-preservation has, on the whole, more than counter-balanced the tendency of a few landholders

mostly in the upper brackets to grow more cash crops.

"Thus, while official figures themselves, if rightly analysed, lead to right conclusions, it is strange that the Madras Government, consciously or unconsciously taken in by the specious plea of big landlords, have come to base their demand for higher paddy prices on assumptions devoid of all validity. Their attitude is all the more to be regretted when their own figures rob the 'incentive' argument also of any substance or force it might have had once. It would be well to remember that in a stagnant economy of chronic scarcity with currency inflation superimposed on it, any price increase after a certain point, instead of being an incentive to increased production, actually turns out to be disincentive in its effects on production. That that point has long since been reached in this State may be inferred not only from the above figures, but also from the peculiar tendency of our agricultural producers in general to reap the monetary benefit of a higher price at the current level of production itself. As any attempt to maximise production, in our land tenure conditions which inhibit efficient farming, is bound to involve increased cultivation costs and increased outlay of capital in respect of scientific farm management and improved methods of cultivation, the

incentive to produce more has to face very real and practical difficulties which have nothing in common with the price factor.

"So, the proposal for higher paddy prices which the Madras Government have demanded of the Centre is, in my view, neither desirable nor warranted by facts. It has neither economic nor moral justification. Any price increase contributing to the enrichment of a few big landowners might only consolidate their already strong position to such an extent that any talk of peaceful agrarian reorganisation on the lines recommended by the Planning Commission will remain a pious wish."

This solitary non-official opinion did not, however, carry weight with the Government who, as usual, bowed to the cooked-up "public opinion" which had ready and generous space in a powerful section of the Madras Press. And paddy prices were since increased by 6½ per cent.

Even after saying so much about the landlords' pressure tactics and the Government's policy of drift and vacillation and "tactical" retreats, the account, I find, is rather incomplete. So reference has to be made to the Government's crowning folly when all the time they sat back in unwarranted complacency without ever

ing to know what the poor peasants, labourers, sub-marginal idholders and the like thought out the powers-that-be and their action or inaction. It is no consolation even for a liberal democrat to find out that what a democratic government did not care to know in advance of the elections is now brought home to them in the shape of reverses. After all he may rightly feel that a little foresight, courage and dynamism on the part of Government in the matter of land reform might well have produced a Congress victory or, which is the same thing, a victory for liberal democracy.

A word, however, about the future role of a liberal democrat particularly in Madras State. As feudal landlordism is breeding reaction in rural areas and endangering democracy

itself and as in the context of post-election conditions Communists have necessarily to come out as moderates, a dynamic liberal democrat would do well to remember that any short-sighted opposition to comparatively radical reforms, even if they be inspired by Communists, may well mean the emergence of intransigent extremism either on the Right or on the Left. To dub Communist moderation as "tactical" and to proceed to act on that assumption may amount to playing into their hands. Conversely, to accept it as genuine may well crystallise it into a reasonably enduring phenomenon giving new sustenance to liberal democracy itself. In other words, a virile and vigilant liberal democracy should, in its own interest, strive its utmost to keep the Communists as long as possible on their present path of moderation.

