

Chapter IV

Contents

Views of the CPI and the CPI(M) on Agrarian Reforms and Rural Democracy.

Section 1(i) CPI's Views on Agrarian Reforms,

" 1(ii) CPI's Views on Rural Democracy.

Section 2(i) CPI(M)'s Views on Agrarian Reforms,

" 2(ii) CPI(M)'s Views on Rural Democracy.

The foregoing chapter has highlighted the programmatic positions of the CPI and the CPI(M) over the issues of agrarian reforms and rural democracy in the democratic stage of revolution in India.

It is noted that the CPI wants to achieve these tasks through its 'national democratic revolution' by building "a national democratic front, bringing together ... the working class, the entire peasantry the intelligentsia and the non-monopolist bourgeoisie. The worker-peasant alliance will be the basis and prior of the front"¹. "The leadership of this alliance belongs to firm anti-imperialist, anti feudal, anti-monopoly forces"². The main task of this national democratic revolution is to direct the national economy along the non-capitalist path of development³ and other important tasks are agrarian reforms for the vast sections of the peasantry and democracy to the rural people.

For the CPI(M), it is the stage of 'people's democratic revolution' which is nothing but an 'agrarian revolutionary stage'⁴. The CPI(M) strives to fulfil its 'people's democratic revolution' by making alliance of the working class, the agricultural labourers, the poor, middle and rich peasants, the urban and other middle classes and the national bourgeoisie led by the 'working class'⁵ based on the 'unshakable worker-peasant alliance'. The programme of the CPI(M) takes the 'democratic agrarian stage' and the

people's democracy to coincide⁶.

Since 1964, their debates are directed to defend their individual parties strategic and tactical policies. Now the discussion is centered round the views of the CPI and the CPI(M) on the subject of agrarian reforms and rural democracy. The respective views of the CPI and the CPI(M) discussed below are nothing but the ideas emanating from the practice of the programmatic pledges by the respective political parties since 1964 to the late 1980's.

Section 1(i) CPI's Views on Agrarian Reforms

The views expressed by the party and its leaders in different times since 1964 on agrarian reforms have been outlined here.

Indradeep Sinha, one of the CPI leaders, stated that the CPI continues to regard the present stage of the Indian revolution as essentially democratic - and not socialist - whose main task is the liquidation of imperialist, feudal and monopoly exploitation and whose strategic class alliance is a united front of the working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie prepared to join the struggle against imperialism⁷. [Emphasis added]

For him the whole agrarian economy is in the grip of a deep structural crisis, under the juggernaut of the crisis-ridden capitalist path in India pursued by the ruling bourgeoisie⁸.

The Political Resolution of the Eighth Congress of the CPI assessed the situation and stated that from the very beginning the capitalist path of development pursued by the Congress leadership contained an inherent contradiction which was bound to thwart the rapid development of our backward economy to an advanced stage. The need for rapid industrialization and increase in production and food and raw materials demanded the establishment of a democratically-run state sector in commanding position in the economy, a firm curb on monopoly development and eradication of the remnants of feudal interests in agriculture.

It has further stated that, in order to serve the interests of the bourgeoisie, whose representative it is, the Congress government failed to take these steps. It allowed the monopolies to grow to unprecedented heights, and encouraged foreign capital to enter the country in ever growing proportions. It failed to carry out land reform, to give liberal assistance to agriculture to grow food and raw materials in a planned manner and to protect agriculture from the inroads of foreign imports and monopoly trading finance⁹.

For the CPI, the capitalist path pursued by the ruling Congress party is the root cause of allround national crisis. "The capitalist path has failed to solve the problem of economic independence of India. The economy of independent India is not an independent economy. The development has been a slow and halting process, extremely painful for the masses and resulting in a miserably low rate of growth. The obstacles that stand in the way of India's achieving full economic independence can not be swept aside precisely because of the capitalist path pursued by the national bourgeoisie"¹⁰.

It assessed the agricultural policy of the Congress rule since independence. The Congress rule has substantially curbed feudal vested interests through various legislative measures. This has been done with a conscious effort to develop and foster a class of rich peasants and capitalist landlords who could become the backbone of the new capitalist agrarian setup and who with state aid could expand production, adopt modern techniques, develop money crops as raw materials for industries, build and sustain cooperative credit institutions, etc.¹¹

Indradeep Sinha has observed that despite certain measures of industrial development during the post-independence period and despite the growth in the share of industry, construction, mining and productive infrastructure in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 18.8

per cent in 1950-51 to 29.9 per cent in 1978-79, nearly three-fourths of Indian population has continued to remain dependent on agriculture. He noted the recommendations in the Draft Sixth Five Year Plan (1978-83) prepared by the Planning Commission, Government of India : "It is a historically unique fact that over the last six decennial census, inspite of impressive development of the large scale manufacturing and infra-structure sectors, the share of agriculture in the workforce has not diminished at all. It was 73 per cent in 1921, 73 per cent again in 1961 and 73.8 per cent in 1971"¹².

Behind this apparent stagnation in the composition of the work force lies the deep-rooted structural crisis of the Indian economy. For, although the national income has grown at the compound annual rate of 3.5 per cent during 1950-51 to 1978-79, as against a mere 1.2 per cent during 1900-01 to 1945-46 for undivided colonial India, the pace of industrial development has been too slow and too slow lopsided to relieve the pressure of agrarian overpopulation which was an evil legacy of the British colonial rule. Since modern industries have been able to absorb only 10 to 11 per cent of the annual addition to the work force and the rest had to fall back on agriculture and the unorganised sector, the work force dependent on agriculture has actually increased from 101.92 millions in 1951 to

167.33 millions in 1971, or from 72.8 per cent to 73.8 per cent or by approximately 65 millions¹³.

For him the peasantry does not remain a homogeneous class under capitalism. He quoted Lenin, "The power of money not only crushed the peasantry but split it up. An enormous number of peasants were steadily ruined and turned into proletarians; from the minority arose a small group of grasping Kulaks and enterprising muzhiks, who laid hands upon the peasant farms and peasant lands, and who formed the kernel of the rising rural bourgeoisie. The forty years since the reform have been marked [describing the conditions of Russia nearly forty years after the Reforms of 1861] by this constant process of 'depeasantising' the peasants, a process of slow and painful 'extinction'"¹⁴.

Indradeep Sinha stated, in India capitalism was super-imposed on a feudal-colonial base by the foreign imperialist rulers. Moreover, there was a huge disproportion between the destruction of the old and the construction of the new. Consequently, the dominant features of 'depeasantisation' under the colonial rule was pauperization of the lower layers of the peasantry. The policies of the capitalist path pursued by the national bourgeoisie in the post-independence period, have compounded the evils of 'depeasantisation' manifold¹⁵.

In justification of his above statement, he cited information from various sources. Thus he stated, that under the British rule, agricultural labourers constituted 17.4 per cent of the work force in 1921 and 19.7 per cent in 1951. During the first two decades of independence (1951-71), the proportion of agricultural labourers increased from 19.7 to 26.3 per cent while that of cultivating peasants declined from 50 to 43.4 per cent. In other words, one-seventh of the peasants during these two decades lost their land, and were pushed down into the ranks of landless agricultural labourers¹⁶. Reports of the two Rural Labour Enquiries have shown that while the number of agricultural labourers increased from 35.3 millions in 1964-65 to 54.6 millions in 1974-75, an increase by 54.7 per cent. Thus employment as well as real earnings declined during the same period¹⁷.

He stated, the degree of pauperization of the lower layers of the Indian peasantry can be judged from the figures of persons officially admitted as living 'below the poverty line'. The 'All India poverty line' was assumed to lie below the per-capita monthly consumption expenditure of Rs. 65 in 1977-78 prices, corresponding to a minimum daily calorie intake of 2400 in the rural areas. As many as 50.82 per cent of the total population or nearly 350 millions were found to fall below 'the poverty line' thus defined¹⁸.

He further stated, this appalling poverty of nearly half the rural population is partly a legacy of nearly centuries' long rule of British imperialism. But, it is also the inevitable result of the policies of the capitalist path pursued by the national bourgeoisie in the post independence period. During the three decades of bourgeois rule, this poverty has not only not diminished but has actually increased.

The national bourgeoisie which headed the freedom movement, despite certain radical declarations under pressure of the rising peasant movement, have never really committed itself to any genuinely radical agrarian programme of abolition of all forms of feudal and semi-feudal exploitation and distribution of land among the tillers of the soil. Hence, in the post independence period, it pursued the narrow, selfish and conservative class policy of curbing some of the worst forms of feudal exploitation and, then, gradually transforming feudal landlords into capitalist landlords and, simultaneously, developing the economy of rich peasants so as to increase agricultural production and create a stable class base for its rule in the rural areas¹⁹.

It was in pursuance of this policy that the 'princely states' were 'integrated' into the Indian Union and Statutory landlordism was 'abolished', of course, with the payment of fat compensation. Consequently, 20 million protected

tenants acquired ownership right over 54 million acre of land, again after payment of 'purchase price', which only the well-to-do peasants could do. But the condition of the unprotected tenants and sharecroppers worsened; because, simultaneously, feudal and semi-feudal landlords were granted legal right to 'resume' land for 'self-cultivation' by evicting tenants with the connivance or even active help of the police and the magistracy. Various types of capitalist measures were also adopted for 'modernizing' farming by landlords and well-to-do peasants²⁰.

This bourgeois policy of reforming and modernizing agriculture along the capitalist path proved extremely costly to the nation and extremely painful to the masses of the toiling peasantry and the landless labourers. Growth in agricultural production is a very slow and halting process. Till recently India had to spend more than Rs. 100 billions in valuable foreign exchange on the import of foodgrains under the humiliating conditions from the imperialist forces. Growing poverty of the masses hampered expansion of the home market and even the planning commission had to admit ruefully 'that the further expansion of industry is limited by the narrowness of the market'²¹. This situation was seized by imperialist financial agencies like the World Bank (IBRD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to presurize India to gradually shift towards a policy of 'export-led growth', thereby tying Indian economy still

more firmly to the international capitalist chain²².

A logical corollary of this reactionary policy has been the calculated sabotage of all further measures of land reforms - particularly those relating to the imposition of statutory ceilings on the holdings of the big landlords and distribution of the 'surplus' land thus made available among the landless and 'land-poor peasants'²³.

Indradeep Sinha quoted Gunnar Myrdal that "neither the political will nor the administrative resources for a radical or for that matter, any fairly effective land reforms were present"²⁴ in India so far.

For Sinha, surplus land under the amended ceiling laws was estimated at 215 lakh acres and out of even this sparingly calculated surplus of 215 lakh acres barely 17 lakh acres of land, or less than 8 per cent of the potential surplus, has been distributed so far.

Consequently, the ownership of land as well as of other rural assets remains highly skewed. Indradeep Sinha opined that despite large scale benami transfers with a view to evade 'ceilings' data provided by the 26th Round of National Sample Survey (NSS) (1970-71), present a picture of gross inequality in the distribution of operational holdings²⁵.

Table 1

Distribution of Operational Holdings in India in 1970-71

Types of peasantry	Amount of operational holdings per household (in Acre)	% of the house-hold	% of total amount of operational holdings cultivated by this stratum
Agricultural Labourers	Nil	27.41	Nil
Agricultural Labourers (having a small piece of land)	Less than 1 acre	14.93	1.69
Poor-peasants	1 to 2.5 acres	18.00	7.60
Small-peasants	2.5 to 5 acres	16.40	14.90
Middle peasants	5 to 10 acres	12.94	22.61
Rich peasants	10 to 25 acres	8.10	30.40
Landlords	More than 25 acres	2.24	22.83
		100.02	100.03

While 27.41 per cent of the households operate no land, another 14.93 per cent operate less than one acre each, and together they operate as little as 1.69 per cent of the cultivated land. These 42.34 per cent of the rural households, undoubtedly, constitute the class of agricultural labourers. Thus, landless labourers and poor peasants,

though constituting more than 60 per cent of the households, operate less than 10 per cent of the land. But, at the other end, landlords and rich peasants, though constituting little more than 10 per cent of the households, together operate more than 53 per cent of the land.

Similarly the figures supplied by the All India Rural Debt and Investment Survey conducted by the Rural Bank of India in 1961 and 1971 show that while the share of the lowest 10 per cent in the rural assets remained stationary at 0.1 per cent and of the top 10 per cent also remained virtually stationary at 51.4 and 51 per cent respectively, the share of the lower middle 30 per cent declined from 2.5 to 2 per cent while that of the upper middle 20 per cent increased from 79 per cent to 81.9 per cent or by 2.9 per cent. The number of 'poor' households (with assets of Rs. 1000 each at 1961 prices) increased from 30 per cent in 1961 to 34 per cent in 1971²⁶.

By citing the above facts, Indradeep Sinha stated that "This extremely skewed distribution of land, capital and other productive assets in the rural areas is the basic cause of the poverty, unemployment, pauperization and destitution of the majority of the rural toiling masses. It is also the basic cause of stagnation and crisis in the national economy. Furthermore, monopoly of land, capital and other productive assets in the hand of a tiny group of

landlords is the basic cause of social political reaction, obscurantism and communalism in our national life"²⁷.

According to the CPI programme, the fundamental characterization of the agrarian sector is that the, "Inter-penetration of the strong survival of feudalism and growing capitalist relations are the dominant characters of socio-economic life in India's countryside"²⁸. And "according to this formulation the dominant character of Indian agrarian economy is not the strong survivals of feudalism but their inter-penetration with growing capitalist relations of production. This is a description of the transitional, multi-structural character of the Indian agrarian economy"²⁹. It is explained that the "programmatic formulation ... is broad enough to cover the entire period of transition from semi-feudal to capitalist or dominantly capitalist agriculture"³⁰.

It is suggested by the programme of the CPI that inspite of these changes towards capitalist agriculture the survival of semifeudal land relations continue to prevail. Semifeudal subletting in the form of sharecropping and various other correlated forms of leasing, such as joint partnership cultivation, etc. continue to exist in a sizeable proportion of the land. Usually constitutes a strong survival of the semi-feudal mode of exploitation and is still predominant³¹.

It further pointed out as to how the survival of semi-feudal modes of exploitation combined with the growth of commercialisation of agriculture have produced a new set of reactionary vested interests in the vast Indian countryside. It states "landlords, and wholesale dealers, often combined in the same person, constitute the modern parasites holding up the progress of agriculture and supporting right reaction"³².

To sum up, the existing condition of the Indian agriculture in the post independence period is that "The national bourgeoisie which assumed power in 1947 compromised with the landlord forces sacrificing the interests of the tenants and other poor sections of the people. This is the basic underlying reason for the large scale sabotage of land reforms. In implementation, the landlords and bureaucracy nexus could successfully sabotage the land reform legislations, particularly the tenancy legislations, more so the ceiling acts. The judiciary also played a very constructive role and aided the landlord class"³³.

Therefore, "Transition to self-cultivation by the feudal and semifeudal landlords meant the transformation of the feudal mode of production based on appropriation of surplus product in the form of rent into capitalist mode of production based on the appropriation of surplus product in the form of surplus value (profit). In other words, it meant the transformation of the tenant or sharecropper into

an agricultural labourer, ready to sell his labour power to his landlord now turning into a capitalist entrepreneur"³⁴.

The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 had been enacted for time to time fixation and revision of minimum wages in employment in which the labour is vulnerable to exploitation on account of its lack of organisation and weak bargaining power. The CPI observed with much concern since agricultural labourers are unorganised, the prevailing wages are not fair to the workers. The minimum wages in agriculture should be linked to the Consumer Price Index Number. Moreover the law enforcing authority is reluctant and the employers of the agricultural labourers are often powerful enough to impose self-fixation about the wages which are always below the rate fixed by the government. There are exceptions in a few states where left parties are strong enough to organise them. However the agricultural labourers are the worst victims of the natural vagaries and seasonal unemployment. The CPI is in favour of social security benefit to the agricultural workers. It thinks, a fairly substantial financial expenditure from the government exchequer should be provided for employment in the dull season. Besides that, old age pension, workers education should be provided, and there should be timely revision and implementation of minimum wages act and domestic and vested land should be provided them free of cost³⁵.

Although there has been enacted the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act in 1976 which has empowered the concerned authorities to implement the ban on bonded labour and to ensure the rehabilitation of such labour, still "the condition of agricultural workers and bonded labourers continues to remain deplorable. Not all bonded labourers have yet been released nor those released been rehabilitated. Agricultural workers do not get fair wage nor is there any all-India legislation to comprehensively tackle their problems. These sections of our people also suffer from widespread social oppression. To fight against these is a major task"³⁶.

Since feudalism was not abolished root and branch, feudal exploitation continued to exist side by side with capitalist exploitation and got intertwined with it. Hence, usury bondage, sharecropping, caste and social oppression often characterised the sale of labourpower by the agricultural labourers³⁷.

But the CPI thinks, the feudal and semi-feudal exploitation is one of fast declining features due to the fact that the abolition of statutory landlordism and of the princely states turned the protected tenants into self-owning peasant proprietors and removed all legal hurdles to the free penetration of capital in land. The spontaneous process of 'depeasantisation', in the context of calculated sabotage of radical land reforms, helped to consolidate more

than half the cultivated land in the hands of the just ten per cent of the households who were landlords and rich peasants. Various state capitalist measures [like green revolution i.e. high yielding crop production through the help of mechanised agricultural implements] which serve to raise the technological level of agriculture, and to strengthen these same elements still further by increasing their command over land, water, seeds, fertilizers, implements, credit, marketable surpluses of food grains and, last but not the least, political leverage over the administration. Even the 37.5 per cent of the cultivated area that continued to be operated by the small and middle peasants, become largely market-oriented; and the high cost energy-intensive technology of the "green revolution" made the small and the middle peasantry extremely cost-conscious. In the majority of cases even their farming ceased to be subsistence farming³⁸.

The net result of these changes in the agrarian economy is that the old stagnant feudal-colonial economy has been replaced by a transitional multi-structural economy in which the capitalist, the small peasant and the semi-feudal modes of production coexist and contend against one another. Though the capitalist mode of production has become the leading structure, it has not yet conquered the entire field of agriculture. Similarly though the feudal mode of production has rapidly declined, it has not yet **vanished** and

continues to exist in the form of strong remnants which interpenetrate the growing capitalist relations. And, finally, the disintegration of the feudal mode of production has given birth to a sizeable small peasant sector, which though based on the small commodity production, is no longer feudal nor yet capitalist, and is yet subject to the laws of capitalist market³⁹.

Just as the bourgeoisie sought to deceive the agricultural labourers and poor peasants with false promise about 'removal of poverty', similarly it sought to dupe the small and middle peasants with the false propaganda that under the new technology of the 'green revolution' even the small farm can become 'viable'. On the contrary the Marxist logic is that - capitalism leads to the ruination of the small peasantry or to the depeasantisation of the peasantry. Therefore, the new technology is irrelevant to the small and middle peasants⁴⁰.

Therefore, the basic contradiction in the post independence period, more particularly from the late 1960s, is the contradiction between manufacturers and agriculturists in the Indian agrarian economy. It is the contradiction between the big industrial and commercial bourgeoisie on the one hand and the mass of the peasantry on the other.

Merchant capital was an exploiter of the Indian peasantry even during the pre-independence period. But

it acted as the comprador agent of British Capital and, as such, played a comparatively minor role in the exploitation of the peasantry. But things have changed in the post independence period. Merchant capital has now attached itself to the big industrial and commercial bourgeoisie which have become more and more dominant in the Indian economy. At the head of the big bourgeoisie stand the 75 monopoly houses who, together control about two-thirds of Indian industry and trade. Some of the monopoly houses are Indian subsidiaries of big multinational corporations who control the commodity trade in several agricultural products, agricultural inputs and essential consumer goods⁴¹.

That is why the 'Twenty Second National Conference' of the CPI's 'All India Kisan Sabha' had declared in 1979 "one major change, brought about by the economic development of the post-independence period, is that the big industrial and commercial bourgeoisie headed by the monopolists and multinationals, have emerged as the main exploiters of the peasantry, leaving the old feudal landlord far behind, whose capacity to exploit the peasantry has rapidly declined"⁴².

Monopolists and multi-nationals are the main link through which the burden of unequal commodity exchange in the international capitalist market is passed on to the

Indian peasantry. And this burden has very sharply increased since the outbreak of the recessionary crises of world capitalism.

The rapid deterioration in the terms of trade between India and the imperialist countries was passed on to the peasantry in the form of a still more rapid deterioration in international terms of trade between agriculture and the other sectors of the Indian economy. The small and middle peasants were the worst victims of this deterioration, because their unit cost of production was higher, market price realization was lower and holding power was smaller than that of the capitalist landlords and rich peasants. No wonder that the small and the middle peasantry constituted the main force of the mighty peasant upsurge at the present time⁴³.

The CPI opposes this bourgeois policy because it will further aggravate the structural crisis of not only the agrarian economy but also the entire national economy. Hence, the CPI demands defence of the small peasant, liquidation of semifeudal and semicapitalist landlordism, distribution of land among the tillers and then, gradual transition to socialist agriculture based on voluntary co-operatives of equal associate producers.

The following tasks⁴⁴ occupy the central place on agrarian front, in addition to some other national and

regional problems. The tasks and tactics will vary from state to state.

i) Elimination of all feudal and semi-feudal survivals through the implementation of genuine land reforms and distribution of ceiling surplus lands to the landless and land hungry, and carrying out democratic reforms in other sectors also.

ii) Abundant preferential state aid to the small, marginal and middle peasants.

iii) Removal of glaring inter-regional disparities by concentrating on the development of backward states and areas.

iv) Ensuring remunerative price for the agricultural produce, removal of the grip of monopolies on the rural market and supply of all essential commodities to the peasants and agricultural labourers through effective public distribution system with supervision of popular committees.

v) Cancellation of debt burden of the small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers and scaling down the other debts, and supply of cheap adequate credit to them, and lowering the tax burdens on the peasants and agricultural workers.

vi) Adequate living wage to the agricultural labourers

and providing guarantees of employment and social security and peaceful life, free from the atrocities of the landlords and the rich peasants. Consumer and other industries should be started in rural areas to provide employment to the rural labour.

vii) Democratisation of local power structure, removal of the domination of vested interests and passing of local power into the hands of the toiling masses.

viii) Effective and urgent steps to be initiated to eliminate backwardness and illiteracy among the people and to start a big renaissance movement.

Land to the tiller, fair wage to the agricultural worker, remunerative price to the peasant and cheap food to the people are the main slogans round which the battle is being fought - the battle for the rejection of the capitalist path and the adoption of the non-capitalist path of development.

The CPI claims that it is pursuing an integrated policy of diversified mass movement embracing all sections of the peasantry and agricultural labourers and directed equally against the survivals of feudalism and the growing exploitation of the capitalist and the imperialist monopolies.

The CPI calls for a tactics in this stage of revolution to rely on agricultural labourers and poor peasants, unite solidly with the small and middle peasants and try to win over or neutralize the rich peasants in order to isolate and defeat the landlords, the usurers, the monopolists and the multinationals in alliance with the industrial working class and other democratic classes and strata⁴⁵.

The CPI visualises, the Indian agrarian economy is multidimensional, multi-structural with inter-regional inequalities and the agrarian economy is changing towards the capitalist mode of production. But the process of change is slow and painful for the cultivating peasantry.

As such agrarian capitalism in India is not 'pure' capitalism but was characterised by the combination of capitalist forms of exploitation with the remnants of feudal forms of exploitation, thereby subjecting the rural masses to the worst feature of both feudal and capitalist exploitation⁴⁶. But the land reforms of the national bourgeois government and the use of modern technology and modern farming, credit system and the commodity market have facilitated the growth of capitalist relations and capitalism in agriculture. The new agricultural strategy of the national bourgeois government is to provide modern input like provision of infrastructural facilities of irrigation, electricity, communications, community development projects etc., mainly with the financial assistance of the World

Bank and other international institutions, for bringing about an increase in agricultural production. And it has done nothing more than to pass a few land reform laws, but has carefully bypassed the radical agrarian reform for the interest of the vast Indian peasantry. As a result, capitalist landlords and rich peasants are steadily emerging under the aegis of bourgeois rule and serving the latter as faithful contingents.

The national and big bourgeoisie have exposed the Indian agriculture to the international financial institutions. From the mid-1960's they are financing the projects for the development of infrastructural facilities for agricultural development with a twofold objective :

- 1) Such a development will create a big market for the multinationals and agro-business and also facilitate their entrance into the country's economy.

- 2) These imperialist forces meant to develop capitalism in agriculture, thus integrating it with world capitalism. It has further developed and expanded credit cooperatives, marketing federation and promoted technological changes. A large network of research, education and extension centres was established for the growth of agriculture, animal husbandry etc. though all those measures have contributed to the development of productive forces, the main benefits flowing from them have been reaped by the upper

strata, particularly the rich peasants and landlords who dominate the village panchayats, credit societies and other local developmental organisations.

However, in the short-run this strategy was responsible for the large marketable surpluses in food grains not only to supply to the urban consumers, but also to build buffer stocks. The country achieved near self-sufficiency in foodgrains, as large sections of the people are below the poverty line having no purchasing power and leading a miserable life⁴⁷.

Because of the capitalist penetration the inequalities of income and distribution have risen to an unprecedented height. Agricultural labourers, poor and small peasants who constitute the majority in the countryside are leading a miserable life and living below the subsistence level. But the capitalist farmers and rich peasants are engaged in investing their surplus in business, transport, industry, money-lending and speculative activities⁴⁸. The following criteria provided by Lenin are relevant to the position and facts of Indian agriculture. They are - 1) Employment of wage-labour and extraction of surplus value.

2) General commoditisation.

3) Reinvestment of surplus production for extended reproduction i.e., capital producing capital.

Y.V.Krishna Rao (General Secretary of the CPI-AIKS) stated that "Basing on these criteria, our conclusion is that capitalist relations have made much headway in the large parts of the country's [agrarian economy], though the level of these relations differ state to state, from area to area"⁴⁹.

For the CPI, the Indian agrarian economy is significantly marching towards the grip of capital - both national, big and monopoly and also imperialist capital since 1960s. The situation is more aggravated as the days are passing by. Consequently the age-old feudal grip over the agrarian economy has occupied the rear seat. Therefore, the fight in the agrarian front is mainly oriented to the big and monopoly and their foreign counter part - the imperialist capital. The non-capitalist path declared by the CPI in its programme in the stage of national democratic revolution is the desired path with which the remnants of feudal oppression will also be fought. In this struggle the party will mobilise the agricultural labourers, poor, small and middle peasants, even the rich peasants will be brought into the fold along with the other working people in the industrial sector and other democratic minded strata. The CPI programme does not rule out the possibility of forging alliance with the national bourgeoisie. Therefore, besides the goal of non-capitalist path and other significant goals are radical land reform, wiping out the remnants of

feudalism, democratisation in all spheres of life and activities of the people in this national democratic stage.

Besides the formation of the programmatic policy about the party's stand for radical land reform in the democratic stage of revolution, the CPI has also put all its energy for launching movements through its peasant organisation and agricultural labourers' organisation. The party has constantly fought in the parliament and state legislatures to enact and enforce the actual land reform for the interest of the vast peasant community. From the beginning the party's rural organisation has fully devoted itself for enforcing the land reforms and the establishment of the democratic rights of the under-privileged sections. However, that too depends upon the organisational power of the party and the party's position in the state governments.

Y.V.Krishna Rao, claimed "The Communist Party of India, the All India Kisan Sabha and the Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union have launched mighty militant nationwide struggles during 1969-72 for occupation of lands of big landlords and industrialists, demanding radical land reforms. Thus, under the direct impact of these powerful struggles, the ruling class was forced to take up the question of land reforms and revision of ceiling enactments. It has formulated national guidelines drastically revising the ceiling laws, lowering the ceiling limit, making the family a unit and

removing all the exemptions that were given earlier. The states have enacted revised ceiling laws, mostly based on the national guidelines⁵⁰. Krishna Rao claimed that the party played an active role in Kerala during Achutha Menon Ministry, West Bengal during the Left Front Government and partially in Maharashtra, Gujrat and Karnataka for land reform and for reorganisation of agriculture⁵¹.

Section 1 (ii) CPI's Views on Rural Democracy

The work for rural democracy is another important task to be performed with the radical agrarian reform in this national democratic stage. However, the programme of the CPI is very insistent on the democratisation of the rural sector along with that of the national political, social and economic life of the Indian people. And this task should be performed, the CPI thinks, immediately in this declared National Democratic stage.

The possible combination of classforce required for ensuring rural democracy in the countryside can be traced from the programme of the CPI. But conceptually rural democracy as a part of national democracy should be highlighted here to provide the context with which the idea of rural democracy is linked.

The programme of the CPI has stated that the class forces interested in carrying through the programme of

National Democratic revolution are : "First and foremost, the working class"; "Second, the broad masses of the cultivating peasants, including the rich peasants and agricultural labourers"; "Third, the rising class of urban and rural intelligentsia"; "Finally the national bourgeoisie, excluding the monopoly section"⁵². [Emphasis added].

It further stated "... in order to create the instrument for implementing the programme we will have to build a national democratic front, bringing together all the patriotic forces of the country, viz. the working class, the entire peasantry including the rich peasants and agricultural labourers, the intelligentsia and the non-monopolist bourgeoisie. The worker-peasant alliance will be the basis and pivot of the front"⁵³. The programme admitted "such a front is not in existence today because the democratic masses are divided into a number of political parties, including the Congress party itself"⁵⁴. Therefore, the programme stressed the need of "Developing out of the joint actions of the mass organisations of workers, peasants, employees and agricultural workers, as well as the Communist Party and other left and socialist parties, the national democratic front will draw its ranks not only the masses following the Congress but also its progressive section"⁵⁵. [Emphasis added].

According to the programmatic formulations of class-forces for the national democratic revolution, the participants from the countryside are the "broad masses of the cultivating peasants, including the rich peasants and agricultural labourers", and the "rural intelligentsia". It includes, in its declared national democratic front the following political parties and sections : "other left and socialist parties", "the masses following the Congress" and "also its progressive section" if they exist in the countryside.

According to the CPI, these rural class forces can be taken into confidence for establishing rural democracy and the left and socialist parties including the masses and the progressive section of the ruling Congress party should be brought within the fold of the front in the countryside to fulfil the requirements for the attainment of national democratic revolution and its success.

The programme has highlighted some of the aims for which democratic movements should be launched in the rural areas as a part of the national democratic movement. The programme stated :

"This national movement will attain its countrywide sweep and striking force when it embraces the broad masses of peasantry and the agricultural labourers in the vast rural areas. The struggle of the broad masses of the

cultivating peasantry, for consistent and thorough completion of agrarian reform eliminating feudal survivals, for putting peasant economy on a sound footing, for ensuring protection from the exploitation by trading and usury capital, for the expansion of credit facilities and the increasing use of modern technique, as well as the struggle of the landless peasants and agricultural labourers for fallow and surplus land, for minimum living wage, for setting up state farms and other rehabilitation schemes for scheduled caste and adivasi landless - all these struggles of the broad rural masses have a national significance"⁵⁶.

The programme of the CPI has stated that the existing local self-governments under the Congress rule are running the administration in the name of the rural people but actually they have become the reliable instrument in the hands of the vested interests in the rural areas. The programme thus observed :

"Local organs of self-government, which are supposed to draw the masses into direct administration of local affairs and development and thereby provide a democratic correction to bureaucratic centralisation and which can be utilised to a certain extent in favour of the people by forging broad democratic unity, are themselves made subject to the dictates of high officials with their control over revenues, advances and loans for the work of the panchayats

and their constructive activities. The powers to remove and supersede elected bodies of local self-government are used at will in order to suppress the growth of democratic forces. The so called panchayati Raj of the people thus becomes an instrument of the bourgeoisie seeking to consolidate its power in the countryside"⁵⁷. [Emphasis added].

The programme of the CPI thus suggested with concern that the bourgeoisie has usurped the rural administration for fleecing the vast majority of the rural people. The existing panchayati raj thus becomes an instrument of oppression over the agricultural labourers, poor and small peasants who constitute the majority in the Indian countryside.

Y.V.Krishna Rao has observed :

"The landlords and rich peasants who have become powerful, are dominating the rural life, economic, social, political and cultural. They are dominating the village panchayats, co-operative societies, and local developmental organizations and are fully utilising these institutions in collusion with the bureaucracy to their benefit. They are trying to perpetuate their hold on the rural masses, and for their narrow selfish ends are dividing the masses on castes and scheduled tribes people and agricultural labourers"⁵⁸.

Rural democracy can not be considered in isolation from radical land reforms in the vast Indian countryside. In Rao's view, two types of contradiction have been accentuated in the countryside in the rural economic front and so also in the correlation of the rural classforces. He stated, the existing situation is leading to the accentuation of two types of contradictions : between a handful of substantial landowners on the one hand and the mass of the agricultural labourers and poor and pauperised peasants on the other hand; and between the big industrialist, commercial bourgeoisie and the multinationals and their stooges on the one side and the mass of the peasantry on the other⁵⁹.

Indradeep Sinha has stated, "Experience of more than a decade of the independent class movement and class organisation of the rural proletariat has brought the lesson home that only a radical re-structuring of the entire agrarian economy can liberate the agricultural labourers and poor peasants, indeed, all working peasants, and rural artisans, from the vicious grip of class and caste oppression and unshackle their vast productive energies for rapidly rebuilding not only the rural economy and the rural society but the national economy and national polity as well"⁵⁰.

"Work of the party branch in the villages should not be viewed in narrow economic or electoral terms. Party

work in the village is emancipatory in the broad sense. We are party fighting for a democratic revolution and in the village we must fight for democratic changes. Our party branch should initiate and lead all struggles and movements for the democratic changes in the village on the economic, political, social and ideological plane. Not only landlords as a class but feudal and prefeudal ideas, traditions, prejudices etc. have to be fought"⁶¹ [Emphasis added].

For example, untouchability is a remnant of prefeudal days. Emancipation of the village is incomplete unless at least this most cruel and humiliating manifestation of the pernicious relic is ended⁶². The root cause of all these ills was within the age-old economic disparity unfavourable to the weaker section all along, even in the post-independence period. Thus it is stated : "social indignities emanating from the practice of untouchability and acute economic disparity arising out of landlessness, wage labour, bondage, etc. present a total picture of exploitation and injustice and any attempt to shake off any of these forms of exploitation easily invites the wrath of the vested interests"⁶³.

It is stated that illiteracy too is a heritage of our feudal and colonial past. Fight against the remnants of feudalism is incomplete unless we fight against its legacy.

Therefore, the CPI should consider eradication of illiteracy as a part of democratic transformation of the village. In fact this section is the basic mass for the communist party. Therefore, eradication of illiteracy is not a reformist work or a work to be undertaken only after the assumption of power. All liberation movements have taken it up along with the struggle⁶⁴.

The plight of women in the Indian villages is another manifestation of feudal culture. The emancipation of the village can not be real until and unless the outlook of the villagers (including women) to the women changes. It is a difficult thing to do but an indispensable thing also. If the party does not take work among women as a part of its job, it will keep out 50 per cent of the population from the purview⁶⁵.

The programme of the party calls for a movement in the countryside for wiping out "Casteism, communalism, religious obscurantism and all sorts of reactionary ideas"⁶⁶.

Fights against, ignorance caste prejudices, superstition are all parts of the emancipatory work. Anything that concerns the welfare of the village people should be a matter of interest where the CPI should come forward. It may be an elementary school or the matter of panchayat or cooperative society where the party should stand beside the toiling people and the peasantry to foil the ill will of

the vested interests in the countryside⁶⁷.

To ensure democratic results for the rural weaker section it is necessary to resist and stop atrocities and caste evils on harijans, adivasis and other rural poor, defend civil rights and promote social equality⁶⁸.

The CPI programme stated that the national democratic government after the national democratic revolution "... will abolish social and economic oppression of one caste by another, as also all social and personal bans and prohibitions imposed by the so called upper castes on lower castes, specially the scheduled castes, in the name of custom, tradition or religion. Such oppression shall be made punishable by law. It will pursue a policy of giving financial and other assistance for the educational and cultural advancement of the people belonging to scheduled and socially oppressed castes, to eradicate these inequalities⁶⁹."

Furthermore, "It will extend and strengthen elected local organs, enhancing their powers and give them more resources to fulfil their responsibilities"⁷⁰.

In fine, the aim of the CPI regarding rural democracy has been very precisely stated thus : "Democratisation of local power structure, removal of the domination of vested interests and passing of local power into the hands of the toiling masses"⁷¹.

The party has taken steps by participating in the panchayat election and in the election of the various societies, associations and organisations as a policy to ensure democracy for the toiling rural people.

Particularly in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura the CPI is actively participating with the other left forces (since 1983) to ensure the implementation of its programmatic policies. It aims to make the local bodies (Panchayats) an instrument of expediting land reform, democratic reform and social justice by drawing the class forces into a solid alliance for the ensuing national democratic revolution.

Section 2 (i) CPI(M)'s Views on Agrarian Reforms

Beside the strategic formulations on agrarian reforms and rural democracy in the programme of the CPI(M) a wide range of views have been expressed in some other documents. These views are of great importance for determining tactics leading to the desired aim of it's declared People's Democratic Revolution in this stage.

In 1967, the CPI(M) adopted one of the most important documents regarding agrarian matters. It was entitled Tasks on the Kisan Front-1967. This has been considered

as the basic document explaining the programmatic understanding in very clear terms on the question of agrarian reforms. It was admitted that the activities of the agrarian reforms were guided by a revisionist line even after the period of the split of the party till 1967. Therefore, it was felt necessary to have a proper guideline of tactics on the basis of the party's programme. The CPI(M) thought that the cause of old revisionist line in the agrarian front was due to the fact that All India Kisan Sabha was jointly led and guided by both the CPI and the CPI(M) till August, 1967,⁷² even after the split. Another important cause was the growing discontent among members within the party about the very strategy and tactics of the revolution in the country like India which in the immediate past was ruled by imperialists and whose economy was basically agrarian. On the eve of another split (a group known as Naxalites from the CPI-M) over the question of Indian revolution particularly on the importance of agrarian revolution the CPI(M) leadership came forward to explain its actual stand on the agrarian front very clearly before the party men and the mass following the party. Naturally, the document entitled Tasks on the Kisan Front (1967) has a wider significance.

This document stated that the party was gripped by revisionist views about the role of the different strata of the peasantry in the agrarian revolution and its role

in the context of anti-imperialist, anti-feudal people's democratic revolution in the democratic stage. This was due to the failure to properly comprehend the tasks in the agrarian front. It was admitted that a sheer revisionist view dominated work in this front. The revisionist view permeated into the following matters, in particular :

i) regarding the actual nature of the prevailing feudal oppression in the countryside; (ii) regarding the type of feudal relationships still remaining in the country; (iii) regarding the inner-strata differences within the peasantry; (iv) regarding the penetration of capitalist relationship into agriculture and the nature and depth of the problem; and (v) regarding the actual understanding of the peasant problem, and real demands of the peasantry.

These assessments till 1967 in the agrarian front were found to be wrong and very suicidal in nature for a proletarian party. These were : (i) there was a compromise of the demands of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers - the semi-proletariat and proletariat sections in the countryside - for drawing the support of the middle peasants and rich peasants there was an undue dependence upon the rich peasants, (ii) there was a dangerous negligence of the demands of the agricultural labourers and poor peasants considering that these demands might create problem to the party in securing the support of the upper ranks and capitalist farmers, (iii) distortions were

caused in the movement against feudal landlords because in an attempt to mobilise all sections of the peasantry there was an excessive dependance on the middle and rich peasants rather than on the rural proletariat and poor peasants, and (iv) weaknesses of revisionism and opportunism were exhibited while making even just demands for subsistent wages and better working conditions for the rural proletariat because there was the fear of breaking the unity of the peasantry if the demand for land and democratic rights of the agricultural labourers would have been placed. The document frankly admitted that the party had failed to inculcate the necessary class consciousness in the peasant front⁷³.

The document stated, all these movements against feudalism and capitalism were carried out on the basis of the non-Marxist concept of all-in unity of the peasantry against feudalism and capitalism, and in this struggle the motive forces of the movement - the poor peasants and agricultural labourers - were given lesser role to play lest their revolutionary role would break the unity in the peasant front. Firstly, this kind of tendency left the entire peasant movement on the mercy of the rich and middle peasants, and secondly, this revisionist leadership as it was a vacillating force within the peasantry, naturally put obstacles to any and every radical peasant movement. The rural proletariat (the agricultural labourers and

small artisans) and poor peasants, were put outside the movement, though for whom the peasant movement should have been organised; and in place of rural poor the rich and middle peasants were given prominence both in the organisation and in the leadership. This was a movement led and organised by the rich and middle peasants, the most privileged sections within the peasantry - which the poor peasants and agricultural labourers were asked to follow.

The document stated, it was a bourgeois revisionist out-look over the working class and peasant unity against feudalism and imperialism. It further stated, this kind of revisionism can only be avoided if the working class leadership over the peasant movement is established and if this leadership depends much on the rural proletariat and poor peasants who constitute 70 per cent of the total rural population. Other subsidiary tasks are to organise the middle and rich peasants so that they may be kept away from joining the feudal and capitalist landlords. The specific slogans in the agrarian sector should be put forward on the basis of the demands of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers and other sections of the peasantry should be brought nearer to this movement. In doing so the poor peasants and the agricultural labourers should be made conscious and active so that they can work with the working class leadership in the peasant movement for the restoration of land from the feudal and capitalist

landlords. In the agrarian front the real force of the peasant movement is constituted with the poor peasants and agricultural labourers. However, the party had actually failed to organise, educate, and provide them the actual role in the revolutionary movement against feudal and capitalist landlords in the country side⁷⁴.

The document has stated that the revisionist outlook in the peasant front in the past has made the peasant movement virtually defunct. The first attempt to rectify these ills in the peasant front has been made through the party programme. The programme was claimed to have put the correct ideological and political outlook against the revisionist view. The document further stated in pursuing revolutionary movement in the agrarian front in this democratic stage of the revolution class consciousness should be the basis of the struggle for land; all the work of the party should be revamped anew. In order to do so, it is an utmost necessity to recruit and educate members from the poor peasants and agricultural labourers, which was actually neglected so far. At present the peasant front of the party is dominated by members from the middle and rich peasant sections. Unless members are properly educated in the ideological points of view, unless they are declassified from their environment and upbringing it is certain that they can never serve the cause of revolution. Only the interest of the class from where they hail will be served by them.

The document has severely attacked the revisionist outlook of the leaders of the peasant movement. Therefore, the need of the time was to recast the forces of peasant movement, to bring the rural proletariat in the first row and let them lead the struggle for land to a success⁷⁵.

The document while treating the revisionist outlook in the peasant front stated, another aberration was due to the party's continuous and persistent emphasis on the parliamentary forms of struggle undermining the mass movement for the genuine demands of the people. This was evident from the first general elections in 1952 onwards. The sheer dependence on parliamentary measures had created an impression among the activists in the peasant front that outstanding problems in the agrarian front could be solved if the power both at the states and the centre were captured through elections. All these revisionist elements in the outlook, and other accompanying weaknesses in the practice actually incapacitated the revolutionary movement in the agrarian front⁷⁶.

After analysing the nature and character of revisionism in the agrarian front of the party, it calls for immediate re-organisation of the entire peasant front on the basis of a revolutionary ideology. Every member of the party in rural areas should work either in the Kisan Sabha (peasant front) or in the agricultural labour's union and give

prominence to the political education of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers so that they became able workers and leaders in the radical peasant movement. By class character they are the most dependable and sincere workers in this front and any negligence of them or of their cause will be purely anti-revolutionary and revisionist in outlook⁷⁷.

Having examined the revisionist outlook in the work of the peasant front by the party leadership since independence, the document had taken stock of the bourgeois landlord governments' so called radical measures in the name of land reform.

The document stated, that the existing bourgeois -landlord government can not do anything radical to change the agrarian sector, because the landlords themselves are in the helm of power in the entire countryside and they constitute the main allies of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, any change even the capitalistic change of the entire agricultural sphere is not possible by this government. Therefore, any land reform measure of the bourgeois -landlord government is one of compromise with the feudal, semi-feudal and capitalist landlords for the obvious class interests of the existing government. It is a false hope that this government will come down to look after the genuine demands of the poor peasants and agricultural

labourers by cutting down the interests of the landlords. As the external and internal crises deepen the bourgeois-landlord government will try to pass the burden on to the general people and the greatest sufferers in this case are the peasantry and the rural proletariat⁷⁸.

The CPI(M) noted that the bourgeois-landlord state has been compelled to take certain measures but these measures in no way injure their own class interest. The document stated "However, the bourgeois agrarian programme aims at achieving certain limited objectives, it seeks, in the main, to reform the old-type feudal landlordism by inducing the landlords to break up and partition their big estates among their kith and kin, to sell some of their 'surplus' lands to the peasants and take to personal cultivation and supervision of their farms more and more though employing hired labour and farm servants, instead of unrestricted renting out of their lands to the tenants as practised earlier. It also attempts at creating a narrow stratum of rich peasantry who, together with the new-type of landlords, can become not only the new political base of the bourgeoisie in the countryside but can also produce the limited surplus of food grains to supply the government of feeding urban centres"⁷⁹.

The document, analysed the intention behind the tall claims of land reform of the bourgeois-landlord government

since independence. "They [the bourgeois-landlords] do not aim at transforming our agriculture into a modern capitalist enterprise, but intend only to modify the reform the earlier forms of crude feudal exploitation, and super-impose on it capitalist forms and relations"⁸⁰.

The document further explained, that the new type of landlords and rich peasants are enjoying the surplus value for their ownership over the land but not for their capital investment over the land. The agricultural labourers who are actually landless peasants are not independent wage labourers in the true sense of the term. They are not yet so organised as to demand standard wages for their livelihood. Barring a few places, such as, places nearer to the cities and towns, places where cash-crops are produced and where intensive cultivation has taken place, a common agricultural labourer receives less wage than the industrial labourer. The wage difference between them is too much. On the one hand, 37 per cent cultivable land is owned by the 5 per cent rural households and on the other hand a large number of peasants who constitute 70 per cent of the labour force in agriculture have little or no amount of land. This situation binds and compels them either to sell their labour power at a lower wage or to die in deprivation. Another effect of this situation is that it has created a stratum of peasants who are tenants-at-will who have no legal rights over the land they cultivate⁸¹.

The document stated, "The congress agrarian reforms created and extended a new-type of landlordism which combines in itself both the features of capitalism as well as feudalism, they created a 'tenant' who combines in himself the features of the serf and the wage workers, and they created a rural wage-labour, who, as a pauperised peasant, forced by circumstances, is tied to the village and farming and has no other go than to accept any miserable wage rate his rural employer is willing to pay. His struggle for better wages is inseparably linked with the struggle for the abolition of landlordism and for land to the tiller, because of no appreciable improvement in the way of securing better wages is possible without breaking the land monopoly and drastically reducing the huge number of the pauperised peasant army. All these aspects will have to be borne in mind while formulating the programme on the agrarian front and building the revolutionary Kisan movement, which strives to unite the entire peasantry in the fight against landlordism⁸².

The document has assessed the result of the land reforms of the bourgeois landlord government since independence in its continuous rule. It stated that in the class structure of the rural sector government has brought about some changes by the penetration of capitalism and land reform measures:

(i) the old feudal landlords have sold a portion of their property to cope up with the ceiling of land, or (ii) they have created partition of their landed property among the family members and sometimes in fictitious names, (iii) many of them have taken the land by evicting the peasants in the name of self-cultivation, and (iv) many of them cultivate their huge amount of land by hiring wage labour. However, these have existed with some variation from one state to another but the very exploitation remains the same. This stratum bears the features of both feudalism and capitalism. Their control over rural economic and social life and their relationship with the rich peasants made them the basis of the bourgeois-landlord rule in the Indian countryside. Now they constitute the oppressor and exploiter class of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers in the countryside⁸³.

The CPI(M) goes back to the Leninist formulations in the analysis of the rural class structure and types of exploitation. It stated, "the present countryside somewhat resembles, in a way, what was described by Lenin in the year 1901, regarding Russia. He observed that in the modern Russian countryside 'two kinds of class antagonism exist side by side : First, the antagonism between the rural workers and employers and the second, between the peasantry as a whole and the landlord class as a whole. The first antagonism is developing and becoming acute, the second to a considerable degree already belongs to the past. And yet, in spite of this, it is the second antagonism that has the

most practical significance for Russian social Democratic at the present time'. It is on this line our party was called upon to make a concrete study of the class changes brought about in the countryside, assess them, properly, and work out its agrarian strategy and tactics"⁸⁴.

M. Basavapunnaiiah stated, "This does not by any means imply that the present day conditions in our rural areas are exactly the same as in Russia of 1901. But, at the same time, the contradiction between the peasantry as a whole and landlordism continues in our agrarian conditions"⁸⁵. He further commented that the land reform of the bourgeois-landlord government is not and never will be the radical step but to adjust with the situation as demanded. The power of rural economy and society remains the same in the hands of a few who were erstwhile feudal landlords. He stated "the Congress government with its pressure tactics on landlords, through the enactment of new land ceiling laws, by the introduction of some amendments to the old land ceiling and tenancy legislations and by repeatedly raising the slogan of land reforms, has enabled the landlords to evict tenants more and more to further partition the land among their kith and kin, to sell some portion of their land at good prices, and to increasingly take to 'personal cultivation' and intensive agriculture and modern farming"⁸⁶.

He stated, there has been a further rise in the percentage of agricultural labourers among the rural households. Millions of tenants, protected and tenants-at-will, have either been evicted outright and thrown into the army of landless or forced to purchase the land rights, paying varying prices to the landlords. The so-called 'Green Revolution' has helped the landlords and the rich peasants in the main to benefit from the loans granted, the fertilisers supplied, the high-yielding varieties of the seed provided, and several other so called rural development programmes⁸⁷.

For him, the changes effected in the agrarian set-up under Congress rule since 1947 can thus be summed up : Reduction in the old form of land-concentration in the hands of zamindars, jagirdars and big landlords, even though 35 to 40 per cent of the land still concentrated in the hands of five to six per cent of the top landlords and the eviction of millions of tenants thrown into the army of agricultural labourers and tenants-at-will due to the plea of self-cultivation, partition of land among the family members or sale of a portion of land if necessary by the landlords. Today's tenants are mostly 'tenants-at-will' with no legal rights, and neither so conscious and organised as to demand ownership of the lands they are cultivating, or to enforce even the legally fixed rent, viz. one third, one fourth or one fifth of the

produce, as the case may be. Nearly 50 per cent or so of the rural households today own no land at all, or only tiny pieces of land which are totally inadequate for making out a livelihood, and have to hire themselves out of others like rich peasants and landlords. They fall into the category of agricultural labourers, handicraftsmen and those engaged in village services⁸⁸.

Another 15 per cent or so of the rural families come under the category of middle peasants who own from two to five acres of wet land, or ten to twelve acres of dry land. They and their families do manual labour on their land, employ a cowherd for tending cattle and hire some agricultural labourers in seasons when there is pressure of work in agricultural operations⁸⁹.

Those who own five to ten acres of wet land or ten to twenty acres of dry land constitute some ten per cent of our rural households and are to be defined as rich peasants. They and their families do manual labour on their farms, but also employ a considerable number of wage labourers and farm servants. They normally not only have enough for their consumption needs but are also able to secure some surplus which can be converted into capital⁹⁰.

This is the basic division of the class differentiation with some variation occurring from state to state, and region to region.

In this given structure, it is evident that the middle and rich peasant households which constitute 25 per cent of the total rural households, will not be moved by the slogans of abolition of landlordism and the distribution of their land among the agricultural workers and poor peasants, though the slogan remains the central slogan of the agrarian revolution, not only because it is in the interest of the agricultural workers and poor peasants but also because it is in the objective interest of the peasants in general and the country as a whole.

The agricultural labourers and poor peasants who are land hungry and respond to the slogan of land distribution wherever they are organised and led, have not felt the confidence to go into action for the expropriation of landlords' land and its distribution among the agricultural labourers and poor peasants. They are mostly moved into action for the occupation of waste lands, government lands and forest lands. Even the occupation of the so-called surplus lands of the landlords, over and above the ceiling laws, could be undertaken by mobilising the agricultural labourers and poor peasants. Some success has been achieved in West Bengal, and in Kerala where left and democratic parties are strong and they have formed state governments at different times⁹¹.

It is a fact that the ruling Congress party, utilising its hold over the state and government during the period

since independence, has been able to draw a sizable section of the peasantry into its political fold and disrupt peasant unity and has been trying to incapacitate the strong peasant movement. There are many other parties which are equally interested in mobilising the peasantry for their instant electoral gain, but they try to build the peasant movement on the basis of rich and middle peasants, unlike the peasant unity on the basis of the agricultural labourers and poor peasants. These parties are not at all interested in translating into practice the central slogan of abolition of landlordism and land to the actual tiller⁹².

The phenomenal increase in the number of landless, which has nearly doubled under the Congress rule, the continued concentration of 35 to 40 per cent of the land in the hands of five to six per cent landlord households, the growing and large percentage of the people as high as 50 per cent - in the category that falls below the poverty line, poverty, hunger and misery of the great majority of our people and the consequent fall in the purchasing capacity of the people, the deepening economic crisis and, above all, the aggravation of the agrarian crisis, additionally emphasise the urgency of the agrarian revolution.

But this task can not be fulfilled unless the revolutionary working class and its Communist Party undertake sustained and deep-going work among the peasant masses.

It requires the creation of a new awakening and awareness on the part of the peasants in general, and the toiling and exploited in particular, to build peasant unity, united organisation and a united movement, on the basis of a new heightened class consciousness. It demands intense efforts on the part of the proletariat and its political party to dislodge the bourgeois - landlord political and ideological hold on the peasantry, and win it as its firm and reliable ally in the struggle for the people's democratic revolution⁹³.

Though the slogan of the complete abolition of landlordism and distribution of land gratis among the agricultural labourers and poor peasants, continues to be the central slogan of the agrarian revolution for the entire stage of the People's Democratic Revolution, taking into account the structural changes effected by the Congress agrarian reforms, taking serious note of the existing state of organisation, level of consciousness and degree of unity among the peasantry, this central slogan remains to day still a propaganda slogan⁹⁴.

Until and unless the basic slogan of abolition of landlordism and distribution of land among the landless and the poor peasantry becomes a slogan of action, the peasant movement will not be able to reach the level of partisan struggles on such a scale and intensity as to enforce partial demands such as reduction of rent, stopping

in the Tactical Line, even the partial demands have serious limitations under the present changed conditions, viz. when tenancy, rents, forced labour etc. no longer exist in the old form, scale and intensity⁷⁵.

In the light of all these developments, the Kisan movement led by the CPI(M), while projecting the slogan of seizure of landlords' land and its redistribution as the central propaganda slogan, and while organising struggles for waste lands, forest lands, so-called surplus lands under the ceiling acts will have to be channelised into other agrarian currents. These concern the question of wages for rural workers, the issues of rent reduction, cancellation of peasant indebtedness, fair price for agricultural produce, reduction of tax burdens, stopping landlords' oppression, and their police hooliganism, removing corruption, etc. so that all these currents can be harnessed into one powerful agrarian movement. Otherwise, the maximum peasant unity, isolating the handful of landlords and their hirelings cannot be achieved, nor peasant partisan forces be able to move among the peasantry. The guerilla areas will not be able to survive and liberation areas and liberation forces cannot be created⁹⁶.

In this context, reference may be made to what the programme of the CPI(M) has stated : "The different

sections of the peasantry play different role in the revolution. The agricultural labourers and poor peasants who constitute 70 per cent of the rural households and are subjected to ruthless exploitation by landlords, by their very class position in present day society, will be basic allies of the working class. The middle peasantry, too, are the victims of the depredations of usurious capital of feudal and capitalist landlords in the countryside and of the capitalist market, and landlord domination in rural life so affects their social position in innumerable ways as to make them reliable allies in the democratic front⁹⁷.

The programme of the CPI(M) very clearly analysed its views on the rich peasant stratum which is helpful for determination of the tactical relationship between this stratum and the middle, poor peasants and agricultural labourers. The programme states : "The rich peasants are another influential section among the peasantry. The Congress agrarian reforms have undoubtedly benefited certain sections of them and to some extent they have gained under the rule of the new post-independence regime. They aspire to join the ranks of capitalist landlords and by virtue of their engaging agricultural labour on hire for work in their farms, they entertain hostility to them. Nonetheless heavy taxation, high prices for industrial goods and inflation constantly harass them so as to make their future uncertain. Subjected to the ravages of the market under the grip of

the monopolist traders, both foreign and Indian, they came up often against the oppressive policies pursued by the bourgeois-landlord government. By and large, they can also, therefore, be brought into the democratic front and retained as allies in the people's democratic revolution"⁹⁸.

It states that, "the core and the basis of the people's democratic front is the firm alliance of the working class and the peasantry"⁹⁹.

The programme of the CPI(M) has clearly spelt out the ultimate leadership of the people's Democratic Revolution. It has stated, "The peoples' democratic front cannot successfully be built and the revolution cannot attain victory except under the leadership of the working class of India and its political party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Historically no other class except the class is destined to play this role ..."¹⁰⁰.

The document Tasks on the Kisan Front has highlighted the party programme regarding the enemy of the radical agrarian reform, against whom the very struggle should be launched. It stated that the slogans of the people's democratic revolution have been rightly incorporated in the party programme and these are sufficient in the present situation for the whole rural poor in their just movement. As the land reform policy of the Congress government is to strengthen the landlords and bourgeois' class alliance, so

the duty of the working class party is to mobilise the rural proletariat and peasantry against the monopoly over land and different types of landlordism¹⁰¹.

This document candidly confessed that the struggle in the agrarian front is one of complex nature : Firstly, due to the complexities of relationships within the sections of the peasantry and between them and the agricultural labourers, the most deprived section of the lot, secondly, varied types of exploitation where some of them are feudalistic, some are purely capitalistic and some others are mixed in nature. The document stated, the agrarian system of India is a unique combination of feudalistic, semi-feudalistic and capitalistic features, actually the capitalistic features have been interpolated in the feudal and semifeudal landlordism. Therefore, the struggle against all these features of exploitation has got a complex character.

Although the struggle is against all reactionaries in the agrarian front including the capitalist landlords, still the main edge of the struggle should be launched for wiping out the residues of feudal and the semi-feudal oppression. Notable feudalistic features, still existed in various ways in various places; these are - monopoly ownership of land, imposition of the high rate of tax over - the peasants, severe exploitation over the agricultural labourers by taking the scope of their miserable poverty, very low rate of wage to the agricultural labourers, usurious money

agrarian front. While exposing the Congress land ceiling and emphasizing the need to unite different sections of the peasantry on different issues facing them, it stated, "Experience has proved that the efforts to solve the problem of redistribution of land through legislations, fixing ceiling on landholdings, are totally ineffective. The landlords and their hangers-on are clever enough to bypass all such legislations to keep with themselves the bulk of their lands. Our party and the Kisan and agricultural labour organisations should not, therefore, allow themselves to be fooled by the idea that the basic slogan of 'land to the tiller' can be realised through adopt and implementation of legislation fixing ceilings on land holdings. Our party should ceaselessly educate the peasant and agricultural labour masses that the basic slogan of 'abolition of landlordism without compensation and giving land to the agriculture labourers and poor peasants free of cost', is to be realised through the mass action of the entire peasantry. In fact, these struggles for the realisation of their basic demands are a part of the main revolutionary struggle, the struggle for the establishment of a peoples' democratic state"¹⁰⁴.

"It is however, possible, for strong, militant and well organised movements of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers to force the unwilling government and landlords to distribute fallow lands to some extent.

It is also possible, through effective mass struggle, to prevent the eviction of tenants from the land they are cultivating, and to achieve land for house-sites for the rural poor, free of cost, to a limited extent. Such struggle against eviction and for the distribution of fallow lands will also strengthen the forces of agrarian revolution that the revolutionary redistribution of land will be possible at a subsequent stage. These struggles, therefore, are of particular interest to the agricultural labourers and poor peasants. Directed as they are against the landlords and the government, no stratum of the peasantry, is opposed to it. Those middle peasants who are holding lands under landlords as tenants are, in fact, interested in the anti-eviction struggles. There is, therefore, every possibility of making these struggles the united struggles of the entire peasantry. It is, however, the agricultural labourers and poor peasants who are immediately and directly interested in them. These struggles, therefore, can succeed only if the mass of agricultural labourers and poor peasants are actively drawn into them and the widest democratic support is built for them"¹⁰⁵.

It further stated, "It should also be realised that, while the agricultural labourers, poor peasants, middle peasants and rich peasants have their different (and sometimes even conflicting) interests, there is something

which unites them all - unity against landlord oppression and the anti-peasant policies of the bourgeois - landlord state, led by the big bourgeoisie. On a series of questions like taxation, prices, allocation of finance for projects and so on. conflicts develop between the urban and rural sectors of the economy, conflicts also develop between the landlords and the rich peasants and the big bourgeoisie, on a number of issues. All these conflicts being within the framework of the class alliance of the bourgeoisie and landlords, they invariably attempt to resolve them 'peacefully', i.e. within the framework of their solidarity as against the proletarian strata. Undue emphasis on these conflicts would, therefore, lead the party to right - opportunist mistakes. It would, however, be equally wrong to dismiss these conflicts within the class alliance of the ruling classes as of no significance. Occassions may, in fact, arise when these conflicts among the various strata of the ruling classes can be so utilised as to isolate the big monopolist bourgeoisie - the strongest partner of the ruling class alliance, the most ruthless enemy of the proletariat and semi-proletarian strata. This, however, depends on the extent to which the agricultural labourers and poor peasants are organised and brought into action, both on their own specific slogans and on the general slogans of the peasantry as whole"¹⁰⁶. [Emphasis original].

P. Sundarayya, General Secretary of the CPI(M) (1964-76), had summed up the strategic views of the party on agrarian reforms for formulating tactics from the programme of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (1964) and from the most important document, the Tasks on the Kisan Front (April, 1967).

He stated, the agrarian relationship in the present context of bourgeois - landlord rule in India is neither purely feudalistic nor purely developed capitalistic but is one of feudalistic and semi-feudalistic. It means capitalistic exploitation has been superimposed over the old feudalistic system. Therefore, what is needed is both the capitalistic and feudalistic and semi-feudalistic exploitation should be fought against without hesitation. He further explained, that one should not misconstrue that the CPI(M) is fighting for the abolition only of feudalistic and semi-feudalistic exploitations and not against the capitalistic exploitation, that will be a wrong understanding of the programme of the party and the later document on agrarian question.

He further explained, in the present day the democratic revolution is not the old type of bourgeois-democratic revolution. In the age of socialist revolution, the very monopoly capitalism should be fought by the leadership of the working class. Accordingly, the agrarian revolution in this age will be performed by launching struggle against

both the feudal and semi-feudal and capitalist landlordisms at a time because these are intermixed in the Indian condition. Therefore, the party calls for revolutionary change of all types of landlordism whether feudalistic or capitalistic as early as possible. These two types of landlordisms are equally oppressive in nature over the vast sections of the peasantry and agricultural labourers in the Indian countryside. He has further cautioned, if these tasks are neglected or avoided no substantial change is expected for the poor peasants and the rural proletariat¹⁰⁷.

Mention may be made in this connection that the CPI(M) like the CPI, has set the record to fight for the causes of the peasantry and agricultural labourers. In the post-emergency Legislative Assembly election in some states the CPI(M) emerged stronger, therefore, it was capable of forming state governments in West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala with the alliance of other left parties (excluding the CPI - 1977-82). Significantly the question of land reform and establishment of rural democracy came to the fore. It has set a noticeable record regarding the land-reform activities, specially in cases of reclamation of vest and benami land from the hands of the landlords, distribution of the same among the poor peasants and agricultural labourers, recording the rights of share-croppers through a special drive known as 'operation barga' & successful movement for revision of wage for the

agricultural labourers are some of the important ones.

The CPI(M)-led state governments, after coming to power, had instituted the panchayat system which was virtually defunct for decades under the Congress rule. The CPI(M) has claimed that panchayats will expedite the unfinished land reform and will keep holding the result of land reforms achieved so far, only because, the present panchayats are the truly democratic body due to the wide participation of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers who constitute the majority in the countryside. It claimed that the strong hold of the vested interests has been curbed. The CPI(M) has claimed, that the peasant organisations and agricultural workers' associations have been entrusted to look after the land reform activities and democratisation of rural institutions which constitute the main tasks embodied in the party programme for the completion of its declared 'People's Democratic Revolution'. The CPI has entered into the alliance led by the CPI(M) after 1982 and is carrying out its activities on the above issues. Now they equally claim the records set by the left front governments of these states, as an example before the oppressed peasantry and the agricultural labourers of other states of India.

Section 2(ii) CPI(M)'s Views on Rural Democracy

The CPI(M) thinks that in the stage of people's democratic revolution another most important task, after the radical agrarian reform, is the establishment of fullest democracy at the rural level. It considers the enormity of the problem, that in the country's vast rural sector where more than seventy per cent of the population reside, they have no real power to govern themselves. The vested interests - the landlords moneylenders and the propertied sections who constitute a minority in the rural population have monopolised the largest share of the rural economy and the power over rural administrative institutions. To redress the age-old oppression economically, socially and politically the programme of the CPI(M) has stressed upon agrarian revolution with first priority and as a concomitant factor the next importance is on the establishment of rural democracy in the people's democratic stage.

The programme of the party clearly stated its aims in the sphere of rural administration. The local bodies provided with power, responsibility and financial support, should be governed by the democratically elected representatives of the people. These bodies are now under the clutches of vested interests in the vast Indian countryside¹⁰⁸.

About the existing situation under the Congress rule in the sphere of rural administration the party programme has stated :

"The administrative system being based on a highly centralised bureaucracy, ... who are divorced from the masses and who obediently serve the interests of the exploiting classes. The so called panchayati raj of the people thus becomes an instrument of the ruling classes seeking to consolidate their power in the countryside. Real democracy of the people can have no place in such a bourgeois democracy run by the exploiters and their bureaucrats"¹⁰⁹.
(Emphasis added).

Although there is a panchayati raj for the rural administration, still it has become an instrument in the hands of ruling classes. Particularly landlords and propertied sections are on top of the rural administration in collusion with the bureaucracy and judiciary. Persons holding higher positions in bureaucracy and judiciary are mostly "drawn from the bourgeois - landlord classes and get their education in exclusive institutions"¹¹⁰ and they "essentially serve the interests of the exploiting classes"¹¹¹.

Actually the system of bureaucracy independent India inherited has not been serving the interests of the toiling mass of people, rural or urban. Relation between the people and the bureaucracy is that of the exploited and the agency of the exploiters. No basic change has taken place in the existing bourgeois-landlord rule¹¹².

During the freedom movement, the often-raised demands were those of abolition of landlordism; radical land reform, decentralisation of power and power to the people so that the people of independent India could enjoy the fruits of democracy economically, socially and politically. After independence, the bourgeois-landlord government wilfully avoided the decentralisation of power through the establishment of panchayati raj. In lieu, Community Development Project was started in some selected areas on the advice of American advisors. With the advice of the American advisors, American help like the use of pesticides, use of modern agricultural implements made a headway for American market in India in the post-Second World War economic situation. After the passing of a couple years the Community Development Project yielded good result for the upper stratum of the peasantry and landlords and it had nothing to do for the upliftment of the rural poor, poor peasants including the middle peasants. Later, Balwantraj Mehta (1958) committee assessed the efficacy of the Community Development Project and recommended Panchayati Raj system. As a result, Panchayati system was adopted by the ruling Congress government at the end of Second Five Year Plan period. But it very soon became defunct, because the ruling party was not interested in decentralizing power or in placing power at the hands of the people. Therefore, the Panchayati raj was handicapped from the birth of this institution. In some

states elections were held once or twice in the beginning but later for a period of more than one or two decades no election was held. This state of affairs existed all over India. Elections were held on the non-party basis but that did not mean non-class character of the Panchayati Raj. The landlords, the rich peasants and their stooges were mostly elected and remained in power over decades without any further election. There was no programmes for the upliftment of the rural poor, agricultural labourers and poor peasants. Rather the Panchayati Raj Institution became an instrument of oppression in the hands of the landlords and rich peasants. These institutions were not at all used for the execution of land reforms, alleviation of the appalling condition of the rural poor, relieving destitution due to the vagaries of natural calamities, spread of elementary education, abolition of caste differences and scorce of other social evils. Actually the panchayati raj became the raj of the few - the landlord, the peasants, the moneylenders and rural businessmen and dealers. The participation of the common people is totally discouraged in most of all the states even today except a few states where left and democratic parties are in power since 1977 in the post emergency period¹¹³.

The programme of the party observed thus, "The community development schemes and panchayati raj (panchayats, block samities and zilla parishads) the government has

Initiated, despite the limited social amenities, and benefits the people can derive from them, are in the final analysis another device to extend and consolidate the rich peasant and landlord base of the ruling class in the rural side¹¹⁴.

Panchayati raj was instituted by the ruling Congress Party as it had passed a legislation for it with a propaganda that it had provided for the decentralisation of power, poverty alleviation of the rural poor - poor peasants, artisans and agricultural labourers, distribution of vested lands among the poor peasants and improvement of agricultural production with the help of modern agricultural implements, seeds and manures. But the ruling Congress party constantly encouraged the landlords and rich peasants to extend and perpetuate its rural base. Therefore, it did not pay any attention to the poorest of the poor in the vast Indian countryside, the poor peasants and agricultural labourers.

The so called minimum wages legislation which was enacted in some states after years of promise and waiting was nothing but a piece of decoration for the statute book. The scale of wages and other conditions of work prescribed in these legislations are such that they are either much below the wage rate prevailing in the concerned areas and where higher rate had been fixed, they had not been enforced. The vast bulk of these labourers neither possess small house-site nor a hut to live in. Six months in the

year they are either completely unemployed or under-employed. Several reports of the government and semi-governmental agencies clearly point out that their real wages are falling, their employment days are decreasing and their indebtedness is growing. Therefore the programme of the CPI(M) asserts, "without a radical change in their living condition, it is unthinkable to change the face of our degraded rural life ..."¹¹⁵.

Democracy at the grass-root level is meaningless if the majority of the people living in the vast countryside - the poor peasants, agricultural labourers and artisans, the lower castes and backward communities are not rescued primarily from their economic penury. Social oppression of caste by caste, a legacy of the feudal society is still prevalent. Communal hatred and sex bias are other important evils affecting the existing society. These age-old social evils are so deep-rooted that a thorough economic reform through radical agrarian re-organisation is the binding necessity. The various poverty alleviation programmes (like '20-points programme' 'Garibi Hatao' NREP (National Rural Employment Programme), IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Project), RLEGP (Rural Labour Employment Guarantee Programme), 'Food For Work', etc.) which were drawn up from time to time proved to be inadequate measures, having little practical efficacy due to the political ill will of the ruling class. The existing ruling Congress party is not at all interested

in decentralising power despite the use of the name of Mahatma Gandhi for building self-sufficient villages with provision for compulsory primary education, encouragement of rural industries, abolition of untouchabilities and power to the people, etc.¹¹⁶.

The CPI(M) has concentrated all its energy for its declared People's Democratic revolution. This party has in this context emphasised the radical agrarian reform. Thus it is eager to bring about a thorough revolutionary change of the life of the rural masses in general and poor peasants and agricultural labourers in particular who constitute the majority section of the rural population. These sections are the beneficiaries of the party's land reform efforts. Therefore, the party has been very keenly interested in organising and mobilising them for its desired aims. In the partisan struggle the CPI(M) is interested in forging a unity of all the rural classes interested in the radical landreform and democratisation firmly basing on the agricultural labourers and poor peasants who constitute the rural proletariat but it reserves the ultimate power to guide all these movements at the hands of the working class leadership, the most farsighted section of the people. The programme states,

"The agricultural labourers and poor peasant who constitute 70 per cent of the rural households and are subjected to ruthless exploitation by landlords, by

their very class position in present day society, will be basic allies of the working class"¹¹⁷.

The programme visualises that for the establishment of rural democracy the following sections of the rural mass will come forward : the agricultural labourers and poor peasants, the middle peasants, the rural middle class intelligentsia and the 'patriotic and democratic forces'¹¹⁸. The programme observed that the agricultural labourers and poor peasants are out and out revolutionary for their class position and that they are the 'basic allies of the working class'¹¹⁹. Therefore, they will be the basis of the rural democracy. The middle peasants too will be the 'reliable allies in the democratic front', because they are the victims of the depredations of usurious capital of feudal and capitalist landlords¹²⁰. The rich peasants engage agricultural labour on hire for work in their farms and they exploit the agricultural labourers. Therefore, there is a hostility between them. The rich peasants aspire to join the ranks of capitalist landlords and they are the gainer to some extent for the Congress agrarian reforms. But they are worried about heavy taxation, high prices for industrial goods, ravages of market under the grip of the monopolist traders and the policy of the bourgeois-landlord government. The programme visualises that, by and large, they also be brought into the democratic front and retained as allies for the people's democratic revolution¹²¹.

These sections are to be mobilized for ensuring agrarian reform and also rural democracy; and the poor -peasants and agricultural labourers provide the leadership as they constitute the "basic allies of the working class"¹²².

In the people's democratic stage the following most important activities are to be performed : (1) ensuring a wide network of local bodies from village upward, directly elected by the people and vested with power; (2) striving to infuse in all the social and political institutions the spirit of democracy, extending democratic forms of initiative and control over every aspect of national life; (3) ensuring democracy by entrusting a key role to the peasant and agricultural workers' associations; (4) abolition of social oppression on one caste by another and untouchability being punished by law; (5) granting special facilities to scheduled castes, tribes, and other backward communities; (6) removal of social inequalities and disabilities from which women suffer; (7) ensuring adequate wages and living conditions to agricultural labourers; (8) eradication of cultural backwardness of the poor and hungry peasants by providing material means to give education to their children; (9) taking steps to make the legislative and executive machinery more responsible to the democratic wishes of the people, etc.¹²³

Mention may be made that CPI(M) is keenly interested in establishing rural democracy which is otherwise known as

Panchayati raj as seen in its party programme. However, it has sought to materialise the programmatic policies by infusing in all social and political institutions the spirit of democracy¹²⁴. Therefore it has taken practical steps in the field of local administration; a wide network of local bodies from village upward has been created with directly elected representatives of the people and by vesting them with real power and responsibility¹²⁵.

In the post-emergency election the ruling Congress party was ousted from the Central government and so also in some states. The CPI(M) emerged with the other leftist allies as strong electoral force in the state of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. Coming to the state power, the CPI(M) put its primary task in the agrarian front and in the panchayat election. In West Bengal the election of Panchayat bodies was not held since 1964 to 1978.

In 1978 panchayat election in West Bengal and in other CPI(M)-led state governments, CPI was not a frontal ally of the CPI(M)-led front governments. But in the Panchayat elections of 1983 and 1988 in West Bengal the CPI participated as a partner in the Left front.

However, the CPI(M) led Left front partners initiated the Panchayat system in West Bengal. This was the first case where political party based election was held.

The CPI(M) leadership has claimed that the three-tier panchayati system in West Bengal is a form of rural democracy and unique in nature. It has thus served as an example before the people of other states. Decentralisation of power through the panchayat system has a great significance to the exploiting sections of the rural people¹²⁶.

It is claimed that the CPI(M)-led Left Front Government in West Bengal has fully pursued the programmatic policy of decentralisation of power. The panchayati system is the best example for rural democracy and rural development and it has ensured the active participation of the poorer section of the rural mass¹²⁷.

Citing the remark of the Development and Planning Department, Government of West Bengal, Dr. Asim Dasgupta a member of the CPI(M) has stated that the members of the Panchayats in West Bengal (1978) by a significant majority, are representing the interests of the poorer sections in the villages¹²⁸. The Panchayats have been entrusted with the responsibility of effective work for rural employment, rural development through some civic measures, like provision of drinking water, roads etc., distribution of ceiling surplus land both for dwelling and cultivation to the agricultural labourers and poor peasants, advancing loans to the poor and above all the responsibility of land

reform and increase of wages of the agricultural labourers¹²⁹.

Panchayat as an institution in the hands of the rural people particularly, the majority section the rural poor, that has been mobilised not only for establishing democracy so that they can fight against the vested interests in the rural areas but also became an instrument for radical land reform. In this connection Dr. Asim Dasgupta has stated, that the involvement of the common people, of the potential beneficiaries, is considered to be very important. For instance, the evidence of recorded bargadars, among others, has played a crucial role in detecting the ceiling surplus land¹³⁰. The Panchayats, the peasant and agriculturists' organisations are the important pillars of land reform and rural development which was so far neglected by the congress government.

Biplab Dasgupta of the CPI(M) has stated that the CPI(M) participates in the parliamentary, state legislative and panchayat elections with a definitely different stand point. It always judges things from the point of view of class basis. The panchayat system (though originally popularised by Mahatma Gandhi) acquired a different class character under the guidance of a communist party. It functions as a tool for ensuring democracy and land reform only because the CPI(M) has been able to ensure the participation of the agricultural

labourers, poor and middle peasants, rural educated middle class in it¹³¹. Therefore, the panchayat system under the CPI(M) leadership becomes an agent for ensuring rural development and rural democracy.

The CPI(M) claims that the West Bengal experiment of panchayati raj under the leadership of the party has been able to move a marked step forward for rural democracy. It has been a living example before the enslaved people of vast rural India.

The views of the CPI on agrarian reforms and rural democracy differ widely from the CPI(M)'s. Although any simple reading of their demands over the two issues are punched with the same slogans uttered in scores of times still their main difference lies in the individual appreciation of the problem and the urge for implementation of programmes for its solution. The CPI(M) since its formation has gone for a radical framing of the agrarian policy of the country on the basis of its assessment that semi-feudal land relations and concentration of land are the two existing dominant features in the agrarian front. Therefore, it has put in its maximum and persistent effort for radical land reforms. On the contrary, the CPI has visualized that the agrarian situation of the country has been changed to a large extent the capitalist policies of the Congress rule since independence. For it, the dominant

character of the Indian agrarian economy is the growing capitalist relations of production in place of feudal and semi-feudal land relations which are one of the objectives of the democratic stage. This understanding of the CPI directed it to expedite the struggle against the remnants of semifeudal land relations and struggle for the increased wages of the agricultural labourers. But it does not see any justification for concentrating all its energy achieve this aim, rather it pledges to fight the main battle against the big and monopoly reactions and imperialist penetration into the national economy. However the forthcoming chapter will analyse their respective practices and track-records to realise their respective programmatic policies on agrarian reforms and rural democracy with special reference to West Bengal.

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83. Ibid., para 10, [see also - Dasgupta, op.cit.,
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84. Ibid., para 11, [see also - Basavapunnaiiah, op.cit.,
pp.26-27] .
85. Basavapunnaiiah, M. The Statement of Policy Reviewed,
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86. Idem.
87. Idem.
88. Ibid., p.28.
89. Idem.
90. Idem.
91. Ibid., p.29.

92. Ibid., p.30.
93. Idem.
94. Ibid., pp.30-31.
95. Ibid., p.31.
96. Idem.
97. Programme of the CPI(M), op.cit., p.44, para 102.
98. Ibid., pp.44-45, para 103.
99. Ibid., p.44, para 101.
100. Ibid., p.44, para 100.
101. CPI(M), Task on the Kisan Front - 1967, para 19,
[see also - Dasgupta, op.cit., p.129].
102. Ibid., para 20.
103. Idem.
104. CPI(M), Task on the Kisan Front - 1967. [see also
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105. Ibid., [see also - Basavapunnaiiah, op.cit., pp.33-34].
106. Ibid., [See also - Basavapunnaiiah, op.cit., p.34].
107. Dasgupta, Sudhansu. op.cit., p.130.
[He quoted P.Sundarayya in his work]
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109. Ibid., para 64, p.26.
110. Ibid., para 68, p.27.
111. Ibid., para 65, p.26.
112. CPI(M). Bhumi-O-Krishak Samashya Ebang Panchayati
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113. Ibid., pp.8-9.
114. CPI(M). Programme of the CPI(M). op.cit., para 41,
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115. Ibid., para 40, p.16.
116. Dasgupta, Biplab. Rajib Sarkar Ebang Krishak Samaj,
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117. CPI(M). Programme of the CPI(M). op.cit., para 102,
p.44.
118. Ibid., para(s) 102, 103, 104, 111; pp.45-48.
[Note : The CPI(M)'s programme excludes the
Indian National Congress and other Communal

& Chaunistic parties like Jana Sangh (now Bharatia Janata Party-BJP) & Swatantra, etc.

See : para(s) 108, 109; pp.46-48].

119. Ibid., para 102, p.44.
120. Idem.
121. Ibid., para 103, pp.44-45.
122. Ibid., para 102, p.44.
123. Ibid., para(s) 88(3), 88(9), 88(15), 88(16), 88(5), pp.36-39; and para 46, p.36.
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