

Chapter-III

**Refugee Organizations: Agitation
& Attainments**

Chapter-III

Refugee Organizations: Agitations & Attainments

I

Since the pre-historic period men had organized themselves under the umbrella of various organizations, sometimes to survive their existence and sometimes to attain a particular goal for their self-betterment. And the modern and the post-modern periods were also not exceptions to that tradition. Accordingly, the East Bengali Hindu refugees who were compelled to leave their hearths and homes and took shelter in West Bengal could feel the necessity of an organization of their own for getting proper relief and permanent rehabilitation, what they considered as their legitimate right.¹

Partition had not only compelled the common Hindu masses of East Pakistan to leave their ancestral homes but also the Hindu leaders. Soon after the Partition of Bengal in 1947 they started their uncertain journey towards West Bengal and other such places for safe shelter and livelihood. These leaders consisted of both the left and the right wings of the political parties. Many of the refugee leaders were sympathetic towards two secret revolutionary parties namely *Anushilan* and *Jugantar* and were also the staunch followers of the ideology of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.² However, as soon as they stepped onto the soil of West Bengal they became the staunch supporters of the Congress; because (a) they were well aware that it was the Congress that could save them, lift them from their moribund condition and provide them new abodes to retain their entity and (b) the refugees were doubtful about the Communists as the latter had supported the war efforts of the British Government in India in a stand against Fascism and were open detractors of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. The Communists were also wary of the Refugees from East Pakistan as they suspected the refugees as communal.³ However, when the refugees poured into West Bengal, the Communists, like members of other charitable organizations, had distributed reliefs among them due to its sheer habits. But in all, the Party was indifferent towards the refugees and one of the chief reasons of that was the political line of P.C. Joshi which was being implemented by the Party during that time that aimed at extending all support to the Nehru Government. Accordingly, the Party was not

in a mode to 'embarrass Nehru by formulating a policy towards the refugees which might have introduced into the Indian scene an incalculable element with an anti-Establishment potential'.⁴ All these factors led the refugees towards the Congress.⁵ But the CPI was also apprehensive about this poked mob lest they should pass into the hands of the Congress or other right-wing parties and be used against the working class for breaking strikes and other anti-Communist activities. The refugees needed employment badly and the owners of the factories found in them a source of cheap labor and utilized them for breaking strikes in their factories. In such a situation, the Communist party followed a policy of neutralization which meant keeping the refugees aloof from the Congress and reaction camps. Keeping this view in mind Bijoy Majumdar was allowed to act among the refugees. He was assigned the task- not to bring the refugees within the Communist fold but to soften the edge of their aggressive anti-Communism. From the middle of 1948 he started working among the refugees as an accredited agent of the party. He called in the members of the '*Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti*' to intrude into the refugee huts to soothe the anti-communism sense of the refugees. Thus, though Bijoy Majumdar was basically an active worker of the Communist Party yet he hid his actual identity with the permission of the party and acted as Congress-man to ensure his acceptability among the refugees.⁶

In the Nineteen Fifties the Indian National Congress attained an undisputed majority in the State Legislative Assembly. On the contrary, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Communists played the role of opposition. The refugees understood that the Congress was ruling party both in the State and in the Centre and thereby was fit for ensuring their safety and security for their relief and rehabilitation. They logically expected rewards from the Congress Government in the shape of compensation for the movable and immovable properties they left behind in East Pakistan and aids for rehabilitation as the Congress was proved to be kind enough to the refugees from West Pakistan in providing required amount of relief and planned rehabilitation.⁷ But very soon their hopes turned into disappointments when the Congress Government both in the State and Centre failed to provide the required amount of relief and the scientific means of rehabilitation to the East Pakistani refugees and adopted discriminatory policy in comparison to the refugees from West Pakistan.

When the refugees of all ranks entered into West Bengal and reached the Sealdah Station they were taken to various Government camps for their temporary living. They got their

names registered as refugees and were entitled to have 'doles'⁸ and later on rehabilitation. The middle class refugees who had their lively traditions of political activism in East Pakistan were quick to organize themselves as pressure groups as they had neither homes nor jobs in Calcutta and were particularly hard hit by Partition. Once who had been respectable persons with homes, lands and secure jobs were compelled to jostle cheek by jowl with other destitute persons of lower status on the filthy platforms of Sealdah Station, overcrowded camps, military barracks and survived at the mercy of the Government 'doles'. It was these people who organized themselves in a swift fashion in order to make a protest against all those appalling conditions and odds meted out to them in various refugee camps.⁹

On the other hand, a large number of refugees who either did not find access or did not take shelter in the Government camps on their own accord, constructed makeshift shelters in the unauthorized occupied lands that came to be known as 'squatters' (*jabardakhal*) colonies. And an estimate calculated that in late sixties, some 26 lakh non-camp displaced persons were living in West Bengal.¹⁰ By the time the refugees of these camps and colonies set up many committees which ultimately became the mainspring of the versatile activities of the displaced Bengali Hindu refugees. The committees were placed under a central committee at the top. These committees were formed out of emergency and with a view to organizing and conducting the struggle for their existence. As time rolled on, these colony committees became the centre of collecting and distributing information, solving the problems of the refugees, constructing policies to be followed by the entire refugee committee regarding the Government, the land owners and the local people of West Bengal. Basically, the committees became the governing bodies elected by the adult franchise of the refugees. Gradually, the refugees could comprehend that the assurances, regarding their relief and rehabilitation, given by the leaders of the various political parties at the time of Partition were nothing but hoax and they were being treated as alien people in their own land. And the promises were made just to be broken.¹¹ Thus, the importance of the colony committees enhanced and became the sheet anchor of the every colony when the colonizing movement attained a new pace.¹²

The committees strived hard and sole to defend the squatter's colonies against all sorts of odds. It stood as defending wall of the rootless refugees against the Eviction Bill, the police assaults and the hired hooligans of the land owner, and became the paramount and

commanding agencies which attained capability to mobilize the vast masses of the refugees for an organized and united action. It was under this background that the various political parties of West Bengal expressed their keen interest for having a grip over the colony committees which they considered as a formidable way for attaining ultimate power. But what was the reason that led the ruling Government of the state to be indifferent, at the initial stage, regarding the refugees? The reason might have been that the refugees were not considered politically useful as they did not have the voting right.¹³ Furthermore, the West Bengal Congressmen, led by Hooghly group already indulged themselves into a power game to have complete control over the party machinery by splitting the Bengal Congress into two different and independent units for two dominions. But the refugees stood as an obstacle in the process of absorbing power game. Thus, the Congress Government as well as the Congress Party of West Bengal overlooked the refugee problems and decided it as temporary one, as they expected that the refugees would make a return journey towards their home at the earliest. Besides, the large scale help might well be the cause of wholesale migration from East Pakistan. Under that background the Congressmen of East Pakistan many of whom were themselves refugees and were on bad terms with the Congressmen of West Bengal took decision for leading the refugees in order to organize them for a centrally administered relief and a planned rehabilitation that the West Pakistan refugees received.¹⁴ The indifference of the Government left the ground clear for the Communist leaders who snatched the opportunity to mobilize the refugees.¹⁵

II

The poor living condition in the camps, inadequate and irregular supply of food and cash doles, and misbehavior of the Government officials were some of the common phenomenon experienced by the camp refugees. All these factors infuriated the camp refugees greatly. Thus, in September, 1948 the refugee Congress-men summoned an All Bengal Refugee Conference under the president-ship of Amritalal Chatterjee at Naihati. In this conference, the first refugee organization named *Nikhil Vanga Bastuhara Karma Parishad* (All Bengal Refugee Council of Action, henceforth NVBKP) came into existence. Amritalal Chatterjee, Nagen Das and Mahadev Bhattacharya held the post of President, Vice-president and Secretary respectively. Both the Congress and the Left minded leaders secured their place in the NVBKP. In the Executive Committee of the

NVBKP most of the members were from Congress but Bijoy Majumdar, Binoy Roy and few others were from Left Block. The chief demand of the NVBKP was the permanent rehabilitation of the East Bengali Refugees in West Bengal.

The conference decided that Amritalal Chatterjee, Mahadev Bhattacharya and Nagen Das would attend the Jaipur Session of the All India National Congress which took place in 1948 and put forward a memorandum to Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India. But the Jaipur Session of the Congress disappointed the members of the NVBKP vehemently. It was in this Session Nehru reacted to the memorandum by telling that he had already got the memorandum and told that the refugees were all foreigners and thus, the NVBKP representatives should contact the Foreign Bureau of the All India Congress Committee.¹⁶

Since the very beginning the NVBKP had two groups: (a) those who demanded the permanent rehabilitation of the refugees without infuriating the Congress at the Centre and in the State, (b) those who wanted the rehabilitation at any cost. The Left minded leaders mainly belonged to the second group. And the attitude of the Central Government towards the refugees compelled them to take the decision that there was no chance of getting anything from the Government without strong agitation. However, Amritalal Chatterjee refused to lead the movement as he was a close relative of Gandhi at the same time a renowned Congressman and thereby resigned from the post of president of NVBKP. In order to continue the activities of the NVBKP another conference was convened in December 1950. The conference was attended by about five hundred representatives from various camps. As a result, a new Executive Committee came into existence with Mahadev Bhattacharya as president and Bijoy Majumdar and Dwijen Ghosh became the joint secretaries. The formation of a new committee paved the way for the Left leaders to have a great say in the day to day happenings of the NVBKP as Bijoy Majumdar was promoted to the post of joint-secretary and Mrinal Khastagir, Arun Dey, Binoy Roy, Sunil Mukherjee, Kamala Das Gupta (all with CPI affiliations) and Nani Kar (Forward Block) were elected as the members of the committee. The conference formed another memorandum claiming relief and rehabilitation for the refugees. But the utmost importance of this memorandum was that it declared for the first time that if the Government failed to execute its demand for permanent rehabilitation then the NVBKP would launch a vehement agitation that might lead to unauthorized and forcible capturing

of land by the refugees.¹⁷ It was also decided in the conference that a mass rally would be held in Calcutta at the time when Nehru would accept the relics of *Sariputta* and *Moggalana* at the Brigade Parade Ground in Calcutta on 14th January 1949. Mahadev Bhattacharya, the new president and a member of the Hindu Mahasabha demanded a fair deal for the refugees. But on 13th January section 144 Criminal Procedure Code was imposed in Calcutta that declared any gathering of four persons on 14th January as illegal. In spite of it, on the fixed date of 14th January nearly fifteen thousand displaced persons assembled at the Sealdah Station for the NVBKP sponsored demonstrations in Calcutta. However, because of the imposition of the section 144 the Congressmen among the leadership decided to hold a hunger- strike in the *Gandhian* style. But the other leaders of the NVBKP preferred to send the small groups of the determined refugees to the Brigade Parade Ground and the Esplanade East area which were adjacent to the Governor's House. The following day, the groups of refugees gathered at the previously fixed venues and started shouting slogans and at 4 P.M. the main refugee demonstrators strived to break through the police cordon outside the Sealdah Station that caused the injury of the two refugees due to police firing and the arrest of fifteen leaders including NVBKP president Mahadev Bhattacharya. The police firing on the unarmed refugee demonstrators did not pour cold water into the enthusiasm of the refugee leaderships and thus, on the same night of 15th January Bijoy Majumdar and Nitish Sheth met the student leaders of the CPI like Hiren Dasgupta, Tripti Guha and Ananda Bhattacharya to launch a greater movement with the help and support of the CPI student's force to focus the public attention on the refugees and protest against the police firing on the helpless and unarmed refugees.¹⁸ Accordingly, on 18th January 1949, a student's rally was held at the Tennis Court of the Calcutta University leading to violent student demonstrations. As a result of it, four persons lost their lives, fifteen persons got injured and nine tram cars were burnt down. On the next day thousands of students moved towards the Writers Building, ignoring the ban under section 144 cr. P.C. leading to the police firing on the students. As a result, five students were killed and two hundred students were arrested. It was the first instance where the refugees and the students eliminated their differences with same pool of blood in the bloody streets of Calcutta. As a reaction to the police firing and arrests, the infuriated mob burnt ten tram cars and five state buses.¹⁹ On the night of 19th January an NVBKP deputation met Sarat Bose, the elder brother of Subhas Chandra Bose, and asked for his assistance. He took the side of the refugees and dispatched a statement to the press condemning the police atrocities and demanded the resignation of Dr. Bidhan Roy's

Ministry. Ultimately, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, assured that he would leave no stone unturned during his tenure to secure the permanent rehabilitation of the refugees.²⁰

In this way, the NVBKP attained a great success in achieving the assurance of the Government for permanent rehabilitation. Another important feature of the NVBKP movement was that the Communist leaders mainly provided the leadership to the refugees under its banner. And by the end, the refugees abandoned their distrust towards the Communist leaders who after understanding the situation started the process of the radicalization of the refugees. The CPI appointed Dharani Goshwami to keep a vigilant watch over the activities of the Communists among the refugees who organized a different local cell of the CPI members. A provisional refugee cell was also formed in which Bijoy Majumdar became the secretary. Thus, as refugees were gradually coming under the influence of the Communists, the Communist Party also started taking interest of the day to day activities of the refugees.

Though, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy had assured the refugees under the pressure of the NVBKP leadership of permanent rehabilitation yet it was not more than theory, as in practice very little was done for the rehabilitation of the refugees. In such a situation, the NVBKP leadership concluded that the Government was playing the game of 'wait-watch and avoid'. Thus, by April 1949 Bijoy Majumdar submitted a new proposal before the Executive Committee of the NVBKP for the forcible occupation of the fallow lands of the Government and the absentee land lords. Earlier Chitta Basu had made a similar resolution though he was howled down as by then the refugees had full faith on the Government's assurance. But now the refugees could understand the hollowness of the promises and thus the proposal of unauthorized occupation of land in defiance of law and order was accepted by the Executive Committee unanimously. The CPI also supported the plan for unauthorized occupation of fallow and waste land in and around Calcutta as it belonged to the party agenda.²¹ The NVBKP launched a vigorous propaganda campaign for forcible occupation of land that included meetings and distribution of leaflets among the refugees clarifying the necessity of forcible grabbing of land etc. But the refugees themselves stood as an obstacle on the way to forcible occupation of land as they were panic stricken and hesitant lest they should get mixed up with adventurist movement of CPI that might lead to police firing and unnatural demise. However, the NVBKP leadership did not lose their

enthusiasm for forcible occupation of land and in order to prove the fruitfulness of the resolution they wanted to put it into test. The NVBKP leadership found out a strip of fallow land at Sodepur, 15 kilometers away from Sealdah, collected some refugees who were living nearby and founded there the first real squatters' colony under the name of Deshbandhunagar. It was followed by the establishment of another colony at Naihati, named Bijoyagar. In this way, the Sahidnagar Colony at Kanchrapara also came into existence under the NVBKP leadership that included the Communists, the other Left Parties and even Congress-men. But initially this land grabbing programme and foundation of the squatters' colonies limited to the north Calcutta only. So, the NVBKP leadership strived to extend it to the south. Here also the Communists, the RSP and other Right Wing Political Parties took active participation in this land grabbing movement. But after its initial failure at New Alipore, on 28th January, 1950 Poddarnagar Colony was established under the leadership of NVBKP where Binoy Roy and Sambhu Chaudhury played active role. In south Calcutta most of the big colonies came into existence between January and May 1950. As new colonies came into existence there arose a necessity of coordinating organization which would bring the scattered and isolated colonies under one umbrella that resulted in the establishment of '*Dakshin Kalikata Sahartali Bastuhara Samiti*' (DKSBS). Sukumar Banerjee (Congress) became the president and Deb Banerjee (RSP) became the secretary of the DKSBS.

III

The NVBKP and the DKSBS had set up squatters' colonies in the northern and the southern suburbs of Calcutta respectively. There were also some other small bodies which were working among the refugees in and around Calcutta. As time rolled on, the refugee leaders felt the need of a central body which would co-ordinate, consolidate and lead the activities of these refugee organizations towards the economic rehabilitations of the refugees. On 4th June 1950 a conference was held at the Commercial Museum Hall where 200 delegates of 43 refugee organizations took part. It appealed to the refugees to make the conference of the 'All Bengal United Central Refugee Council' a great success through bulletins and adopted resolutions demanding relief and rehabilitation of the refugees. Another important and almost a revolutionary feature of the meeting was that besides the Hindu refugees it also took up the cause of the displaced Muslims thereby decided to bring both the communities under the banner of the same organization for the

fulfillment of their basic needs. After that, a preparatory committee was formed and Satyapriya Banerjee and Ambika Chakrabarti became the president and secretary of the committee respectively. They took the responsibility for organizing a refugee conference where both the Hindu and the Muslim refugees would participate. The committee took the decision that one representative from every two thousand refugees, one from every political organization and fraternal delegates from other organizations would participate in the conference. It also decided that the energetic refugee workers might take part in the conference as joint representatives.²²

The All Bengal United Central Refugee Council conference was held on 12th and 13th August 1950. The delegates' session of the conference was held on 12th August 1950. On that day the Central Committee of the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) was set up. Along with CPI, The Forward Block, Marxist Forward Block, Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI), Bolshevik Party, RCPI (Rebel), Democratic Vanguard, Socialist Republican Party (SRP) and Hindu Mahasabha attended the conference and the representatives of the afore mentioned political parties were included into the Central Council. The Central Council, as its first agenda, gave a call to the refugees of all quarters to assemble at the *Maidan* on 13th August to oppose the step motherly attitude of the Government towards the refugees. Around 50,000 refugees took part in the *Maidan* meeting held on 13th August. Here it was decided that the camp and colony refugees should hold regular protest meetings to ventilate their demands i.e. the demands for their rehabilitation. In this way, the United Central Refugee Council or UCRC came into being on 13th August 1950. The establishment of the UCRC marked a new beginning of the struggle of the refugees for rehabilitation as thereafter, more protest marches and demonstrations of the Bengali refugees were organized under its guidance. However, at the initial stage the activities of the UCRC mainly remained confined to the squatters' colonies. Most of the squatters' colonies in and around Calcutta and specially those of Jadavpur, Bijoygarh, Tollygunge, Kasba and Behala came under the control of the UCRC.²³ In order to increase its political influence, the CPI paid importance for the solution of the refugee problem and the refugees also started coming under its umbrella in the hope of rehabilitation within West Bengal.²⁴ The Communist party in its circular to all Party members and units instructed to organize refugees all over Bengal and thus, launched a movement under the aegis of the UCRC. It undertook a campaign of mass signature to get recognition for the refugee colonies and to fulfill the demands of the

refugees for their rehabilitation and franchise. The week between 26 January and 31 January 1951 was marked as Colony Recognition week.²⁵

In the refugee camps, apart from the CPI, the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) led organization 'Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sammelan' (SBBS) or 'All Bengal Refugee Conference' and an organization named 'Bastuhara Kalyan Parishad' or 'Refugee Welfare Council' guided by RCPI had dominant roles. RCPI was more active in the camps situated in the District of Nadia. Thus, till 1958 the UCRC drew the camp refugees with the help of the PSP to the programmes acceptable to all. In this regard one thing was noticeable that the refugees, wherever they were staying, built up the primary base of the struggle. In all the colonies - colony committees, *bustee* committees in the *bustees*, camp committees in the camps and struggle committees in the rehabilitation centers were established. It indicated that the initial attempt of establishing a greater refugee organization relating rehabilitation remained hidden among the refugees themselves.²⁶

The movement for the unauthorized occupation of land and setting up squatters' colonies pushed the Government into sheer difficulties as it spread like wild fire. The serried thatched huts stretched from Kanchapara to Jadavpur. The Government was unprepared for such type of critical situation and had no definite idea how to face the situation. However, the Government without wasting time issued Gazette Notification ordering the squatters' to vacate the plot of the land in their unauthorized possession otherwise they would be evicted forcibly. But the refugees simply ignored the order and clung to their thatched makeshift shelters. However, it is worth mentioning that though the Government issued notification directing the refugees to vacate the occupied land but the notification did not contain any threat to the refugees. It was perhaps because of the fact that the Government was not in a position to dismantle 149 colonies that grew up in and around Calcutta and provided abodes to about 1, 49,280 refugees on an area of 2,390,049 acres of land.²⁷ At the same time, by then the Government had in its refugee camps 1, 45,049 refugees. Naturally, prompt eviction of the refugees from unauthorized occupied land would result in extra burden for the Government that it did not want to bear with. Again there arose a Ministerial Crisis in West Bengal when on 12th June 1949 Sarat Bose defeated the Congress candidate Suresh Das in Calcutta's first by-election and formed the nucleus of a united Left Front against the Congress candidate.²⁸ It was followed by a political offensive against Dr. Roy's Ministry spearheaded by Amar Krishna Ghosh (The

Congress Chief Whip) and Surendra Mohan Ghosh (WBPCCC President). This situation prevailed until Dr. Roy's return from England in September 1949 and created a possibility of an interim General Election in West Bengal. However, the Gazette Notification gave the land owners an opportunity to rescue their seized land. They took the help of the hooligans and police to vacate their land. This situation led to the ugly incidents. Many refugees got injured and some of them lost their lives. The police and the hired hoodlums did not differentiate the women and children and tortured them equally as per with their male folks. For example, at Dhakuria a pregnant woman named Binapani Mitra was killed by a police bullet.²⁹ She was the first woman martyr in the history of the refugee movement of Bengal.³⁰

Similarly at Mahesh, in Hooghly district, the land lords and the police raided the colony, destroyed the newly erected shanties and razed them to the ground. They did it repeatedly. But in spite of it, the squatters' did not lose their courage. They rebuilt their makeshift huts under the cover of darkness. The confrontation between the refugees and the hooligans of the landlords had graphically been represented in a novel called '*Badwip*', and depicted their life and struggle in the following way –

Suddenly without warning, the darkness exploded in shouts and screams. There were sounds of lathi's clashing. The *zamindar*'s goondas had descended upon the refugees to demolish their homes. 'This land belongs to Bhupal Saha. Who gave you permission to build here? Trying to grab land, you -! Sons of bitches!

Chandi, Mona, Subal picked up sticks, broken posts and rushed out. A blow left Chandi with a cracked skull. Landlord's land? Not even jackals frequented this place - we were the ones who worked out butts off to clean the land and build our shelters. And now you want to occupy the land? Let's see who can force us out of here. Let's see how many muscle-men the landlords has'

Suddenly the sounds of gun-shots – silence then retreat. Shooting –firing from guns.

Confusion, running about, screams, children crying and amidst this, from some hut came a heartrending scream. 'Somebody has been shot', a woman's voice screamed. Paran's mother has been shot in the chest. Hurry -take her to the hospital!³¹

But very soon they developed a model of organized resistance against the persistent police attacks. When the squatters met with *lathicharge* and very often were tear- gassed, Arun Sen, a young CPI student leader of Baranagar took the leadership of the squatters' at Mahesh. Under his guidance the refugees showed a distinct mode of resistance against the

frequent police raids. Separate volunteer forces were formed for men and women. When the Police came to destroy the huts they saw that the women volunteers stood in the vanguard against their atrocities. Behind them were placed the male volunteers, children brought the rear and Arun Sen acted as an overall commander. In spite of the stiff resistance on the part of the squatters, the Police assault continued. Finally Arun Sen brought all the happenings to the notice of the UCRC leaders like Ambika Chakrabarti, Mani Roy, Bijay Majumdar etc. They, without delay, visited the colony and advised the squatters to cling to their land. Thereafter, they published statements in news papers condemning police atrocities on the squatters and held meetings in camps and colonies and submitted a deputation to Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. In spite of it, the Police assault continued for more than three months and after that the UCRC leaders brought the matter to the court which gave the verdict that if an individual stayed in unauthorized occupation of land or premises uninterruptedly for at least three months then no criminal proceedings could be led against him and thus the Police did not possess any power to intervene into the matter after that stipulated time. Only a civil suit could be filled against him.³² So, what the squatters had to do was that they had to resist all the attempts of forcible eviction at any cost for the first three months. And if they would have been successful in doing so and could stick to their land for the initial three months then practically the land belonged to the squatters. This verdict of the court pushed all the land owners in a great difficulty in the attempt of getting the squatters to vacate the land as a civil case would be time-taking and incur high expenses.³³

But the Government was not ready to accept that verdict as an ultimatum; and thus reacted against it by drafting a Bill secretly called the 'Eviction of the Persons in Unauthorized Occupation of Land Bill' to safeguard the interest of the land owners. The Eviction Bill which after subsequent modification came to be known as Act XVI of 1951 empowered the land owner to file a petition in the court of the competent authority on payment of a court fee of 50 paise to evict the squatters from the unauthorized occupation of land. The inspectors of the courts of the competent authority were entitled to collect the name of the squatters and ascertain the amount of the occupied land. Again the Bill proposed to provide compensation with the land lord for that period until the land remained under the control of the squatters.³⁴ As stated that the Bill was drafted secretly and the Government strived its best to pass the Bill at the earliest. But incidentally a copy of the Bill came into the hands of Bijoy Majumdar who was UCRC's contact man in the State Secretariat.

The UCRC promptly circulated the cyclostyled copies of the draft of the Bill in the colonies making the squatters aware of the forthcoming danger in the form of eviction unless they fought heart and soul for their newly attained homes. But Dr. S.C. Banerjee and Dr. P.C. Ghosh, sitting MLAs of the *Krishak Majdoor Praja Party* (KMPP) hardly believed the copies of the draft and termed it as 'propaganda stunt of the Communist'.³⁵ But when the Assembly met and those two MLAs got the same draft copies of the Bill earlier circulated by the UCRC they became sure of the authenticity of the news leaked by the UCRC.

Thereafter, the battle against Eviction Bill became fiercer. The UCRC declared an all-out war against the Eviction Bill. About the Bill, Dr. Roy told at a press conference that the Bill was essential if his Government was to get to power to deal with the squatters' colonies which violated right to private property guaranteed in the Constitution of India. However, Dr. Roy assumed that the refugees had a great grievance as they had been uprooted from their ancestral land in spite of their innocence. Thus, the Eviction Bill tried to conciliate the demands of law with the needs of the refugees. Firstly, the Bill identified the high-price land and separated them from the low price land. It was done so that the low price land could be secured for the squatters by reaching a compromise with the land lords. The Government hoped that the proprietors of the low price land would realize the gravity of the situation of evicting the squatters and would agree to sell the land if the proper price of the land could be offered to them as section five of the Eviction Bill entitled the Government to acquire land offered by the proprietors for sale. But the squatters would have to leave the high-price land as there was no possibility of selling such lands by its owner, at the same time; neither the Government nor the refugees had the required resources to purchase the high price land. But the Section 4 of the Eviction Bill appeared to have protected them from instant eviction as it secured for them the security of alternative accommodation as much as possible close to the occupied land which would not compel the squatters to change their profession they were engaged in so far. But this condition was subject to the meaning of the definition of the refugee incorporated in the Eviction Bill.³⁶ Thus, directly or indirectly the Eviction Bill appeared to have formed to evict the squatters who violated the prevailing law and order. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee criticized the Bill strongly and regarded the Bill as one sided and blessed the land owners with undue favors except the clause which authorized the Government to give the refugees alternative accommodation before their eviction from the land they had

occupied.³⁷ Dr. Mukherjee argued strongly in favor of the refugees and suggested that the Government should find out certain solution of the problem through discussion between the land owners and refugee organizations and he himself gave some suggestions which according to him could be the basis for arriving at a general agreement. Finally, the amended version of the Bill was adopted by the Assembly largely in line of his suggestion.

Against the Eviction Bill the UCRC followed two fold strategies: ³⁸(a) memorializing the Government and opposing the passage of the Bill in the Assembly House with the help of the members sympathetic to it; (b) organizing the refugees for the purpose of defending their newly attained houses and taking them out into the streets of Calcutta for a long and bitter struggle. But the UCRC itself had many problems. UCRC was not such an organization dominated by one party rather it was a composite organization in which CPI ruled high. It was still at its nascent stage and needed much more time to attain maturity. At the same time, a rival organization named Refugee Central Rehabilitation Council (RCRC) came into existence which drew colonies towards it, dominated by the Krishak Mazdoor Praja Party, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Forward Bloc (Leela Roy's Group), The Revolutionary Communist Party of India (Saumen Tagore's Group), The Socialist Party, etc. Again some of the lower middle class persons had a great respect for private property and thus were not ready to defend their newly attained land and homes beyond a modest effort and were willing to turn their unauthorized occupation into legal possession through a settlement with the land owners and become a part of the settled society. The UCRC by dint of its organizational and leading capabilities tackled all these odds systematically and very cautiously. The policy of the UCRC leadership was to keep Calcutta in a state of continual seize by drawing the refugees into the streets and to create a restless pressure on the Government to accept the demand of the refugees.

As time rolled on, the movement against the Eviction Bill gathered momentum. The process was that the UCRC distributed leaflets among the refugees that contained detailed discussion of the Eviction Bill, demanded its withdrawal and full rehabilitation of the refugees. Again the leaflet appealed to the refugees not to submit to the Eviction Bill and to continue fight against it till death and gave a call for united action of all refugee organizations. Besides, meetings were held to speak out the written words in the leaflet so that the message could reach even those who could not read. The UCRC also tried to turn

the movement into a general movement of the people of West Bengal by demanding abolition of landlordism and redistribution of land among the landless. By this time a Bengali film, named *Chhinnamul* was made and the central theme of the film was tragedy and sufferings of the refugees. This film was shown in the picture houses of Calcutta in such a time when the anti-eviction movement was gathering momentum and the film shook the conscience of elites of Calcutta as the refugees undertook a desperate struggle for their survival. But all of a sudden the Refugee Central Rehabilitation Council (RCRC) formed a Refugee Eviction Resistance Committee (RERC) and started holding meetings to strengthen public opinion against the Eviction Bill. Like UCRC, RCRC also commenced holding meetings and demonstrations in the squatters' colonies and also in Calcutta. But in practice, the UCRC and RCRC laid emphasis on the same points. The leaders of RCRC such as Dr. P.C.Ghosh, Charu Roy, Sibnath Banerjee, Tridev Chaudhuri etc condemned the Eviction Bill and claimed its withdrawal. They also demanded that the refugees must be rehabilitated on the land they had squatted. On 5th August 1950, at a meeting of 1500 refugees held at *Karbagan* under the leadership of RCRC 'the speakers criticized the Congress Government for its utter failure to solve the fundamental rights of the refugees [sic] ...' ³⁹

Though the UCRC and RCRC agitated for the same demands with regards to the refugees yet there were some organizational differences between these two associations. The organizational machinery of the UCRC was more powerful than that of the RCRC. Most of the colony committees were under the control of the UCRC and it stood by them throughout the time. Again, the UCRC adopted a slow but steady policy against the Eviction Bill. On the contrary, RCRC adopted a policy of confrontation with the Government and did not have up-to -the-mark organizational machinery. Its presence could be felt only when some issue agitated the refugees. But it did not have any solid base among the refugees. The refugees considered the movement against Eviction Bill as a question of survival. Taking advantage of the situation, the RCRC assumed the leadership and moved forward for a direct confrontation with the Government. Dr. P.C.Ghosh (KMPP) and Dr. S. C. Banerjee (KMPP) appeared to be the outstanding champions of the refugees during the movement against the Eviction Bill.⁴⁰ But the UCRC leadership wanted to lead a united movement of the refugees against the Eviction Bill. The leadership expected a temporary coal scene of the two associations for a complete success against the Eviction Bill. Again it suggested that if the amalgamation was not possible then a united

movement could be conducted through a Co-ordination Committee of the Left Party. Refugee Eviction Resistance Committee (RERC) rejected the offer of the UCRC.

It came to light that the Government was going to introduce the Bill after its deferment at several times on 28 March 1951. Accordingly, both the UCRC and RCRC fixed to hold rallies in Calcutta. The UCRC decided to hold the rally at the Monument while RERC proposed to organize a rally at Wellington Square. Both the rallies were fixed to be held on 28 March, 1951, the proposed day of the introduction of the Eviction Bill. The RERC desired to take out a procession of the refugees after the meeting and proceed to the Assembly flouting the ban under section 144 cr. P.C. Earlier RERC dispatched a letter to UCRC requesting it not to hold meeting on the same day and join it in defying the ban under 144 cr. P.C which the Communist members of the UCRC could not but refuse as they considered it tactically to be wrong to go headlong into frontal clashes when a split had taken place within refugee rank.⁴¹

In accordance with the previous schedule two different big rallies were held on 28 March- one at Wellington Square another at the pedestal of the Monument. The RERC organized its rally at the Wellington Square where S.C.Banerjee, Rammanohar Lohia, Saumen Tagore, Leela Roy and other leaders not only denounced the Eviction Bill but also demanded its withdrawal. When the meeting was over the leaders guided the refugees in a procession towards the Assembly House. The Police *lathi* charged the processionists and took into custody Dr. S.C.Banerjee, Leela Roy and Charu Roy. At that point of time Dr. P.C.Ghosh came out of the Assembly House and informed the processionists that the Government had adjourned the introduction of the Bill and hence they should go back. At the same time, he told that a students' strike would be held on 29 March and the future course of action would be formed out without any delay.

As stated earlier, that the UCRC also decided to hold a rally on the same day and accordingly they organized it at the foot of the Monument. The main speakers were Satyapriya Banerjee, Jyotish Joardar, Ambika Chakrabarti, Jyoti Basu and others who laid stress on the need of a united movement against the Eviction Bill. At the same time, they condemned the Police assault on the RERC procession. But the UCRC leadership was in favor of the joint action against the Eviction Bill with the help of the RERC. Keeping this view in mind the UCRC leadership met the RERC to discuss about it. But Dr. P.C. Ghosh expressed that the decision of the RERC regarding the joint action would be intimated to

the UCRC leadership on 29 March. On that day the general council of the RERC brushed off the proposal of the UCRC. In spite of it, the UCRC leadership did not lose the hope of a joint action against the Eviction Bill and accordingly Jyoti Basu and Satyapriya Banerjee met the leaders of the RERC at 24 Chowrangi Road. But Saumen Tagore, the spokesman of the RERC, Dr. Ghosh and Dr. Banerjee turned down the proposal of the UCRC. On 30 March the RERC organized another meeting at Wellington Square where along with the students 500 refugees were present and the leaders of the RERC like Saumen Tagore, Dr. Banerjee and others spoke out their own concern over the refugee problem. On 31st March Dr. Banerjee arranged for a press conference and dispatched a message expressing RERC's desire of holding a meeting with the Government regarding the Eviction Bill. Dr. Banerjee suggested for the amendment of the some of the provisions of the Eviction Bill which Dr. Roy readily accepted. As a result, a generally agreed and compromised formula came out to which the leading members of the opposition including Jyoti Basu also gave their consent. Next day, Dr. Roy expressed the compromised formula, formed on the basis of the suggestions of Dr. Banerjee that he revealed in his press conference, to the press.⁴² The following changes⁴³ were introduced in the Bill:

1. The definition of the term bonafide refugee and Competent Authority would be changed. The altered definition of the bonafide refugee would read : 'A displaced person is a person who or whose family, in opinion of the Competent Authority , was ordinarily resident of East Bengal, now pertaining to Pakistan but also who or whose family on account of disturbances occurring after October 1946 arrived in West Bengal on or before December 1950.'The new definition of the Competent Authority would be: 'A Competent Authority is a person who is a judicial officer who is not below the rank of a district judge appointed by the Government with the approval of the High Court.'
2. Section 4 of the Bill was reworded thus: ' A displaced person who on the 31st December 1950 was in unauthorized occupation of any land where on a house was built by him on residential purpose shall be permitted to the occupation thereof on payment of such consideration periodically or otherwise as the Competent Authority by order may deem feet to assess and the occupation of such shall not be disturbed until the Government provides for him other land or house for residential purposes in an area which in the opinion of the Competent Authority enables the person to carry on such occupation as he may be engaged in for earning his livelihood at the time of the order.'
3. Section 4 was further reworded to read: 'An appeal from the decision of the Competent Authority will be to a Tribunal of three persons presided over by a person who is a judge of the High Court and the decision of the tribunal will be final.'
4. It was decided that other minor changes suggested by the Opposition might be effected at the time of the discussion of the Bill in the Legislature.

Though Jyoti Basu regarded it as victory for the refugees but two UCRC leaders reacted to the agreement and argued that the agreement had attained no success except the rephrasing of some of the clauses of the Eviction Bill. The UCRC leadership also took offence at Basu's approval of the Bill without prior discussion with them. The UCRC rebuffed Mr. Basu in the meeting of its Executive Committee that took place on 2nd April, when he suggested for postponing all the demonstrations and rallies until the date of the introduction of the Eviction Bill in the Assembly House.⁴⁴ In that meeting it was decided that on 4th April black flags would be pulled up in all the refugee colonies and camps as a sign of the protest against the Eviction Bill and activities of RERC. And a rally would be held on the same day at the *Maidan*. In that rally the speakers of the UCRC accused the self-appointed refugee leaders and the Government agents. Ultimately, on 4th April 1951 the Rehabilitation of the Displaced Persons and Eviction of Persons in Unauthorized Occupation of Land Bill, 1951 (Act XVI, 1951) became an Act. On 29 June 1951, Dr. Roy declared in a press conference in the Writer's Building that the Government had already collected a comprehensive number of the account of the squatters, their built structures and the price of the land under their possession. He continued informing that a Competent Authority had already been assigned the task to accept petitions from the original owners of the land about the land unlawfully captured by the refugees and take necessary steps as per the new law. He also expressed the desire of the Government to execute and implement the new law with no delay.⁴⁵

There was a series of protest meetings in the refugee colonies against the enactment of the Eviction Bill. In these meetings the UCRC leadership argued that the Eviction Bill was passed due to the division among the refugee ranks and the overwhelming majority of the Congress Party. They appealed to the refugees of all strata to make a united resistance to prevent the implementation of the Eviction Bill which according to them meant to protect the interest of the landowners and land speculators. On 10th August 1951, the UCRC Executive Committee met at a meeting and adopted a Resolution that stated that the Act would safeguard the interest of the landlords and land speculators and apprehended that the implementation of the new law could only pave the eviction of the squatters in colonies. The Government first tried to settle the claims for compensation on the part of the land owners from the refugees living in the squatters' colonies for their unauthorized occupation of lands and houses. The Competent Authority had already started taking petitions for compensation from the landlords and when the collection of the petitions

would be over he would issue notices to the squatters' demanding compensations. Though, there were democratically elected committees in the colonies but the Competent Authority purposefully ignored those Committees and dealt with the individual refugees directly. But the refugee leadership expected that the Competent Authority should deal with the refugees through the colony committees, but that was not followed. The Resolution urged to the refugees not to fix any settlement with the Government individually and appealed to them to make settlements through the colony committees unitedly. It alarmed the refugees against the policy of the Government to sow the seeds of dissensions among them to evict the squatters without much hindrance and thus the refugees must keep their organization unscathed to preserve what they had already gained and continue their fight against eviction. The Resolution again stated that the UCRC did not want confrontation with the Government rather it wanted a settlement on the basis of compromise. The Government did not pay heed to the repeated appeal of the UCRC. But it did not lose its hope and accordingly put forward a set of proposals for the peaceful solution of the problems. The proposals were:⁴⁶ (a) Recognition of the squatters' colonies; (b) Distribution of lands in possession of the squatters at pre-war prices payable at long term installments; (c) Distribution of waste and fallow land at pre-war prices payable in installments; (d) Permission to stay in the abandoned military barracks and vacant houses at a reasonable rate of rent; (e) Grant of Government subsidy to the indigent refugees unable to pay either price of the land or rent; (f) Rehabilitation of the helpless and poor refugees at the expense of the Government.

The Resolution expressed that this set of proposals could be the basis of the discussion between the representatives of the refugees and the Government for a compromised settlement. The UCRC declared that if the Government would proceed to a compromise settlement the refugees would voluntarily leave the land and the houses of the small owners and the displaced Muslims as soon as they got alternative accommodation to live in. When the debate was going on in the Assembly regarding the Eviction Bill the Government had claimed that it had collected land for the rehabilitation of the refugees if that was true the Government should rehabilitate there the refugees living in the Government camps and the displaced Muslims. The Resolution further urged to the squatters in colonies, military barracks, vacant houses, and all refugee organizations to prepare the records consisting of the list of the plot holders and other relevant information and submit it to the Competent Authority for a candid settlement of the problem in

accordance with the proposals mentioned above. Finally, the Resolution appealed to the camps, barracks and vacant houses to stir up public opinion in favor of the demands of the refugees and clarify the case of the squatters for the removal of all sorts of misunderstanding crept into the relationship of the refugees and the local people of West Bengal. The UCRC demanded that the Competent Authority must act through the Colony Committees and he must not issue the notices for compensation and eviction.

In this way, the UCRC again became the centre piece of the refugee organizations. On 24th August 1951, the UCRC held a meeting at the Indian Association Hall where the UCRC leadership laid stress on the need of solidarity among the refugees of all walks to launch a vehement protest against the implementation of the new law. This meeting was followed by a series of meetings in the refugee colonies and camps. The UCRC leadership prepared a comparative analysis of the clauses of the original Bill and the amended version of the Bill so that the refugees could consider whether the amendments actually introduced any permanent change in the Bill. The UCRC demanded the rejection of the all clauses that were against the interest of the refugees and adjournment of the implementation of the Act until new amendments, that would protect the interest of the refugees, were passed. They demanded the inclusion of the following amendments in the Act:⁴⁷ (a) The squatters should be permitted to acquire the land they had occupied at fair price payable in installments; (b) Definition of the term 'Refugee' should be more comprehensive that would incorporate the people from East Pakistan who were in West Bengal prior to partition and displaced Muslims; (c) The refugees must not be evicted from the colonies, camps and houses until alternative accommodation was made available to them; (d) Interim relief and shelter should be provided to the displaced Muslims; (e) The Government should acquire the lands of the big landlords and the speculators for the rehabilitation of the refugees;

It was fixed that a resistance movement would be started during the enactment of the law and the commencement of its implementation in accordance with the following programmes:⁴⁸

- a) The committees of colonies, barracks, bustees etc should begin a vigorous propaganda campaign throughout West Bengal and incorporate all refugee organizations, farmers, workers, students and the middle class people in this organized course of action.
- b) A volunteer's force should be set up in every area with sizeable refugee members.

c) A campaign fund should be built up.

Then the colony committees organized a series of deputation in order to stand between the Competent Authority and the squatters. The colony committees acted as links in the organizational chain of the UCRC. The UCRC appealed to the Government to recognize the colony committees. When the Government refused to recognize them the UCRC told the refugees not to recognize the Competent Authority. The UCRC could understand that it was beyond the power of the Government to evict the 1, 50,000 squatters. And even if the Government evicted them in a repressive way it would definitely pose a serious threat to the settled life of West Bengal. And the Government would definitely not allow it to take place. Yet the Government was so interested in evicting the squatters because of the continuous pressure of the landlords and the land speculators. Thus, when the UCRC was mobilizing the refugees for a vehement agitation the Competent Authority also started demanding compensation and issuing eviction notices to the squatters. But the refugees did not pay heed to the notice issued for the purpose of compensation and eviction. As nobody met the Competent Authority on the part of the refugees then the only option left for him was to enforce the eviction notices. The eviction notices made it clear to the refugees that the Government was aiming at the eviction of the refugees, not their rehabilitation.

In such a situation, UCRC gave a call for a convention of the squatters on 2nd December 1951 at Deshabandhunagar that was attended by 150 refugee representatives. In that convention the UCRC placed a Draft Resolution that was granted with minor changes and demanded a compromised settlement of the squatters. The Resolution laid stress on the necessity of placing the case of the squatters, in the form of the dossier consisting of all the required information regarding the squatters and their colonies, before the Government as well as the people of West Bengal. It should be done to convince the local people of this state that the squatters wanted a fair solution of the problem and were enthusiastic to co-operate with the Government for a prosperous West Bengal. The UCRC also took the decision that the refugees should meet the small owners of the lands they had occupied and clarify to them about the stand of the UCRC in respect of their lands.

Thus, it is clear from the discussion made above that the UCRC took an active interest in the ongoing politics of West Bengal. It had an overwhelming support of the refugees who were prepared to follow its lead. Thus, as soon as the refugees started achieving

citizenship rights or the voting rights the UCRC found a solid ground under its feet. And in the General Elections of 1952 the UCRC appeared to play an important role. Almost the entire refugee population worked actively for the candidates of the Left parties. They canvassed for the Left Candidates, organized meetings and processions, raised campaign funds and did all clerical works related to electioneering. When the result of the election was declared it became evident that the Left Parties became successful in areas with concentration of the refugees in large number.⁴⁹ It proved that the pro-Congress attitude of the refugees had gradually turned into hatred that brought them under the banner of the red block. After the victory of the candidates of the Left parties in the polls, the Provincial Committee of the CPI acknowledged the key role of the refugee workers in the General Election of 1952. However, the emergence of the UCRC as a parallel centre of power became the apple of discord between UCRC and the CPI. The CPI leaders became fearful about the growing power and popularity of the UCRC among the party cadres. And the expulsion of Indu Ganguly in 1954, a prominent CPI leader and one of the founders of the DKSB, from the party exhibited that prevailing tension.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, the UCRC took decision to organize a convention of the refugees staying in the colonies and camps on 15th June 1952 at Lalbagan and adopted a Resolution that included the following demands for a permanent solution of the rehabilitation problem.⁵¹

- (i) Alternative accommodation for the squatters in places from where they would be able to continue their present occupation;
- (ii) Waste land belonging to the Government and the big landlords should be acquired through a tripartite commission formed with the representatives of the refugees, the local people and the Government. These lands should be distributed to the refugees and the landless of West Bengal;
- (iii) Refugees should be granted adequate loan for house-building;
- (iv) Refugee agriculturists should be given agricultural land with seed grains and tools necessary for cultivation of land;
- (v) Government co-operatives should give business loans to the refugees;

On 17th August 1952 another convention of the representatives of the colonies and camps was held at Deshbandhunagar which demanded:⁵²

- (1) The regularization, not recognition of the colonies.
- (2) A tripartite conference; and
- (3) Stay of the enforcement of Act XVI of 1951.

In the mean time Satyapriya Banerjee the President of the UCRC met A.P. Jain, the central Relief and Rehabilitation Minister on 11 September 1952. Jain told him that land could not be acquired at a price within the capacity of the refugees until the Constitution was amended. And the colonies could be regularized only when the acquisition of land would be possible. Banerjee made Jain aware of the fact that there was sufficient land within the periphery of West Bengal where the refugees could be rehabilitated systematically. He further explained that his contention would be proved if a proper land survey was done. If the land survey expressed the scarcity of the land then the question of the rehabilitation of the refugees outside of West Bengal would come into consideration. But in that circumstance also, the refugees should be settled in the regions contiguous to West Bengal. He added that an enquiry committee should be set up with the representatives of the Government, the UCRC, the members of the Assembly and Parliament in order to look into the subject. If the Government appeared to be failed in accomplishing its duty then an enquiry committee would be formed under the guidance of the UCRC to detect condition of the refugees and evaluate the possibility of their rehabilitation through the establishment of the multi-purpose co-operative societies. And the refugees themselves would establish those multipurpose co- operative societies. Thereafter the UCRC held a large meeting at the Maidan. In this meeting the speakers appealed to all political parties to be united regarding the refugee rehabilitation issue. In this meeting a resolution was also adopted. It demanded a radical change in the Government's policy regarding refugee rehabilitation, insisted on the immediate distribution of 1.9 million acres of fallow land in West Bengal among the refugees and criticized the Government for sending the refugees outside of West Bengal for the purpose of rehabilitation.

But the Competent Authority continued to issue the eviction notices and the land owners started using the hoodlums to vacate their land. Even there were instances of clashes between the refugees, the Police and the land owners' hired men in some places especially at Jadavpur, Dum Dum and Sodepur. On 2nd November a man was killed at Poddarnagar. As a reaction to it the UCRC Executive Committee held a meeting and passed a resolution criticizing the police atrocities on the refugees and also demanded a judicial investigation into the killing of the refugee. The UCRC issued a circular after the meeting of the Executive Committee and convened a convention of the refugee representatives on 7th December at Bandhabnagar to discover means so that the eviction of the refugee families

could be stopped. It also aimed at considering the pilot scheme of the Government to regularize the squatters' colonies. The convention explained that the pilot scheme could not solve the refugee problem and accordingly demanded a repeal of Act XVI of 1951. The case of refugees was taken to Parliament by a CPI, MP, Renu Chakrabarti who demanded an alternative accommodation for those refugees before eviction. Ananthasayanam Ayengar, the Deputy Speaker, after considering the gravity of the situation declared that the refugee families should not be evicted before they were assured of alternative accommodation. Thereafter the UCRC organized a convention at Tollygunge on 15th March 1953 where refugee representatives of the 200 colonies participated. The resolution adopted by the convention was as under:⁵³

- (1) The Government must rehabilitate all the refugees immediately and grant loans for that purpose;
- (2) Not a single refugee must be evicted from any colony;
- (3) The Government must grant aid to all the schools in the colonies founded by the refugees;
- (4) All the colonies of Tollygunge should come under the tollygunge municipality;
- (5) The Act XVI of 1951 should be replaced and an act passed for the rehabilitation of the refugees;
- (6) There would be a central rally at the Calcutta Maidan on 27 March. Processions would proceed from the Maidan to the Assembly;
- (7) The Government had promised to regularize the 93 of the 250 colonies, the rest must be regularized.

However, on 26th March a meeting of the representatives of the colonies took place where the date of the proposed rally was changed from 27th March to 7th April. The CPI fixed its mind to make the proposed rally a success and accordingly the Secretariat of West Bengal CPI issued a cyclostyled note (No31/53) in Bengali on 22nd March to all the District Committees and Cells in Calcutta. The party Secretariat instructed the members to take an active participation in UCRC demonstration in front of the Assembly. According to the previous programme schedule the procession of the refugees assembled at the foot of the Monument in the afternoon. Thereafter at 4.30 P.M. the combined procession of the refugees consisting of 7000 men and 1000 women marched towards the Assembly House under the leadership of Satyapriya Banerjee and Ambika Chakrabarti. The processionists reached the Assembly House, sat on the road in front of the north, south and west gates. Thereafter, the leaders placed their memorandum demands in front of the House. Jyoti Basu, while delivering speech in front of the west gate condemned the Government for its indifference to the deplorable condition of the refugees and urged the refugees to stay there so that the Ministers and the MLAs could not come out of the Assembly House. At

the same time, he demanded that an advisory council should be formed that would include the representatives of the Leftist Parties. Hemanta Basu and other refugee leaders delivered their speeches in front of the refugees at the north gate and south gate respectively. The sitting refugees kept all the exit points of the Assembly House blocked till 6.45 P.M. Just then Satyapriya Banerjee appeared at the north gate of the Assembly House and told the refugees that they had become successful as they were able to confine the MLAs and the Ministers at the Assembly House throughout the day and told that the refugees should march towards the Monument Maidan. At 7 P.M. the refugees making four processions arrived at the Maidan where Ambika Chakrabarti and Jyotish Joardar felicitated them due to their united stand against the Government. They also pronounced that the future programme would be formed at the next meeting of the UCRC Executive Committee and it would be communicated to them in time. Then the refugees again formed the procession and went back to their respective colonies peacefully. The 7th April Demonstrations placed following charter of demands before the Assembly House.⁵⁴

- (1) Re-orientation of the rehabilitation policy of the Government;
- (2) Setting up of an All-Party Advisory Board;
- (3) Fixation of the price of the land through a tripartite conference;
- (4) Alternative accommodation for those living in barracks, bustees and houses;
- (5) Withdrawal of eviction notices served on the squatters and repeal of Act XVI of 1951;
- (6) Rehabilitation of the displaced Muslims and grant of interim relief to them;
- (7) Rehabilitation of the refugees through the economic regeneration of West Bengal;
- (8) Speedy rehabilitation of the refugees in the Government Camps and an overhaul of the administration of the Government camps;
- (9) Provision for appropriate work and adequate wages for refugees in work-site camps;
- (10) Relief to the unemployed refugees;
- (11) Repayment of loans granted to the refugees only after their proper rehabilitation .

The UCRC not only made the demands and placed it before the House rather it pressed the Government to execute those demands at its earliest. Earlier the UCRC wanted a solution of the refugee problems through dialogue and wanted to avoid confrontation with the Government at any cost. But now UCRC shifted its stand point and moved forward to streamline its organizational machinery for a confrontation with the Government if needed, to achieve its target. Thus, UCRC laid stress on the unity of the refugees, understanding with the students, peasants and workers and building up of a volunteer corps and these became the core theme of all the UCRC meetings.

In 1954 the Committee of Ministers published its report that confessed the legality of the some of the major demands raised by the UCRC. Such as, it admitted that from humanitarian perspectives the eviction of the squatters from the colonies could not be supported thus it would be an inhumane act to evict them without giving them substitute accommodation. The report urged for the recognition of the colonies established on the unauthorized occupation of land and recognized the need of granting Rs 1, 250 or more if required, as loan for buying lands in unauthorized occupation of lands at current price. At the same time, the report recommended that if the current market price was higher than Rs 1, 250 the Government should negotiate with the owner of the lands to settle refugees on their unauthorized occupation of lands. The UCRC demands for the fixation of a price instead of current market rate for lands in unauthorized occupation was admitted by the report and thus acknowledged the necessity for the amendment of clause 31 of the Constitution to acquire land at a fair price.⁵⁵ Besides, the report assumed a more comprehensive definition of the term 'displaced person' and declared that such persons would be recognized as displaced persons who had entered into West Bengal from East Pakistan not later than 1954, and those who lived outside East Pakistan prior to Partition and whose families were compelled to take shelter into West Bengal due to Partition. It can be assumed without least doubt that the Minister Committee's report adopted a wider meaning of the term displaced person because of the constant agitation of the refugees under the leadership of the UCRC. Thus, when on 17th July 1954 the UCRC representatives met A.P. Jain, the Rehabilitation Minister, then he agreed to recognize the colonies established in 1950 even if these were not enlisted in the Government's list of colonies. Jain made it clear that the question of recognition of colonies established after 1950 would be considered by the Government. Hence, the Government admitted it indirectly that Act XVI of 1951 would be inapplicable to the squatters' colonies. Accordingly, the Competent Authority constituted under it became irrelevant so far the squatters' colonies were concerned.⁵⁶ Furthermore, during the Minister-ship of Jain an amendment to Article 31 of the Indian Constitution (compensation for properties) was done that empowered the Government for taking over land for the resettlement of the refugees and for that, only the Parliament formulated the compensation rates, not any court of law. In pursuance to that, the Government of West Bengal undertook a movement to regularize the squatters' colonies during the Minister-ship of Renuka Ray and accordingly towards the end of 1956 after getting the land on which the refugees squatted *Arpan patras* (title deeds) and loans were given to the squatters to get themselves settled.⁵⁷

So, it was evident that the report had mostly accepted the demands of the UCRC and it was obviously a great victory of the democratic movement led by the UCRC.

In principle, the Ministerial Committee accepted the responsibility of the rehabilitation of the refugees. Accordingly, some rehabilitation works had begun on the basis of the certain schemes. But all these came to stand still in 1958 when Mehr Chand Khanna became the Minister for Rehabilitation of the Government of India. He made an attempt to arrest the influx from East Pakistan through the introduction of Migration Certificate from the High Commission Office situated at Dhaka. The system was that those who wanted to get the Migration Certificate they had to accept the condition that they would not demand rehabilitation after their arrival in India. He also declared that as there was no sufficient land for the purpose of rehabilitation so the refugees have to go outside of West Bengal. But the UCRC vehemently opposed the decision of the Government to send the Bengali camp refugees to the outside of West Bengal for their economic rehabilitation. The role of the UCRC in tackling the problems of the refugees who were sent and were being planned to send outside of West Bengal would be discussed in the following paragraphs.

IV

The UCRC and the Bettiah Camp Deserters

A large number of Bengali refugees were sent to the relief camps of Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Tripura and in other parts of India in accordance with the decision of the Central and State Government of West Bengal as both the Governments concluded that West Bengal was not in a position to bear the burden of such a huge number of refugees. Bettiah, situated in the Champaran District of Bihar, was the largest of the many refugee camps out-side West Bengal improvised for the Bengali refugees and at times the number of refugees reached 70,000 there that was comparable to the Cooper's Camp in West Bengal. The Cooper's Camp and all other camps situate out-side West Bengal were administered by the Central Government of India. In the Bettiah Camp low amount of cash doles, irregularity in the disbursement of the weekly doles, unsuitable climate, insufficient medical facilities, poor water supplies and sanitary arrangements, non-management in the camp administration, communication gap due to linguistic problem, hauteur of the Bihari camp officials and hostility of the local peoples all those factors disappointed the refugees. At the same time,

there was no prospect of rehabilitation in sight and accordingly 15,000 refugees left the Bettiah camp, came back to West Bengal and reached Howrah early in 1957.

The deserters finally spilled over to Howrah Maidan and Sealdah Station. Due to the starvation and disease within ten days from the date of their arrival sixty persons lost their lives. The UCRC took up the issue of the deserters immediately. The CPI also lent its helping hand towards them and the Calcutta District Committee of the CPI met on 16th April 1957 where it formed a plan of campaign. The District Committee also took the decision that- (a) the People's Relief Committee and the UCRC should jointly collect funds in Calcutta on 21st and 24th April for helping the deserters; (b) on 17th April a deputation of the representatives of five major parties should meet Dr. B. C. Roy. And then the leaders of the various refugee organizations would meet on 19th April for formulating, if the situation demands, a programme of direct action in the line of civil disobedience movement. However, when the leaders of the Leftist Party met Dr. Roy, he expressed that he was unable to do anything for the Bettiah deserters officially as they left the camp without any notice beforehand and thus, he could only make arrangements for the temporary relief through non-official organizations.

On 19 April a meeting of the leaders of the various refugee organizations took place where the programme of action formulated by the Calcutta District Committee was approved and the UCRC swung into action without delay and organized meetings and demonstrations. At the same time, a new command structure was formed for conducting the ensuing agitation where along with the UCRC all the Leftist Refugee Organizations would participate. An Action Committee was also formed on 27th April with the representatives of all the Leftist Parties and groups in order to conduct the agitation. Accordingly, the UCRC also formed a Campaign Committee that would liaise between the Action Committee and the UCRC Executive Committee. The members of the Action Committee met M. C. Khanna, the Central Rehabilitation Minister on 29th April and placed their demands for interim relief for the Bettiah deserters, simultaneously they demanded a joint enquiry into the difficulties that compelled the refugees to desert the camp. But M. C. Khanna rejected both the demands of the Action Committee rather he asked the leftist leaders that they should persuade the deserters to go back to Bettiah where arrangements had been made for the permanent rehabilitation of the 5,000 refugees on the part of the Government. They made an objection to the piecemeal rehabilitation policy of the

Government that was likely to inject division among the refugees. The deputationists further pointed out that it was needless to send the deserters back to Bettiah as there was sufficient reclaimable land in West Bengal that could be utilized for their rehabilitation. But Mr. Khanna expressed to them that he was unable to say anything without having a consultation with the Chief Minister.

Thus, there appeared a necessity of the direct action that was to begin on the 4th May and it was fixed that the proposed movement would take the shape of Satyagraha that was a mark of protest against the inhuman treatment of the East Bengali refugees at the Bettiah Camp. The Satyagraha commenced on 4th May and continued till 6th June when 146 refugees offered Satyagraha at the junction of Old Court House Street and Esplanade East. The Satyagrahis wore badges and shouted slogan-‘Give us food and shelter and save us from starvation, or take us to jail.’⁵⁸ When the Satyagrahis broke through the police cordon they were arrested. Among the arrested persons Ambika Chakrabarti, Sarat Chatterjee and Sudhir Ghosh were brought to the Central lock-up at Lal Bazar but the rest were sent to jail. Accordingly, the Action Committee put forward two demands: (a) a joint enquiry into conditions at Bettiah; (b) Interim relief for the deserters. The Committee would withdraw the movement if these demands were fulfilled otherwise the movement would be continued.

On 30 May it was decided at a meeting of the Action Committee that Apurbalal Mazumdar would act as an inter-mediator for holding talks between the group leaders of the deserters and the Chief Minister and would make arrangement for the departure of the deserters. The group leaders also agreed to return if they would get the arrear cash doles for the last two months. On 5th June the Action Committee again met where Apurbalal Mazumdar disclosed that he along with Hemanta Bose and Jatin Chakrabarti met Dr. Roy on the same day and requested him to ascertain the opinion of M. C. Khanna about the demand of the Bettiah deserters. Dr. Roy contacted with Khanna over phone and he consented to pay the arrear cash doles. Besides, the Central and Bihar Governments agreed to improve the living conditions in the camp and remove refugee families to rehabilitation sites within March 1958. The deserters were further promised to effect a twenty percent increase in the rate of cash doles, to open fair price ration shops and to establish two training cum production centers. Dr. Roy also promised to make arrangements for a special train for the deserters so that they could reach Bettiah; release

all the Satyagrahis and withdraw all the cases commenced against them.⁵⁹ Finally it was fixed that on 6th June the Satyagraha would be withdrawn.

Most of the deserters went back. However, some deserters did not go back and got lost in the great human mass of Calcutta and its nearby region by erasing their refugee identity. And those who went back to Bettiah did not have an easy passage of life. Neither the Central Government nor the Bihar Government kept their promises. Thus, the Bettiah Camp Refugees decided to start a peaceful Civil Disobedience Movement on 15 May, 1958 for the fulfillment of their demands. But on 13 May when the leaders of the refugees, after being invited to a conference to discuss their grievances with the District Magistrate, went to the Guest House they were arrested. This treacherous behavior infuriated the refugees. When they *gheraoed* the Block Commandant for the release of their leaders the armed police opened fire that resulted in the death of five refugees on the spot and many got injured. In this way, the movement of the Bettiah refugees came to an end. The refugees were not rehabilitated there and were dispersed to other Government camps. However, Renuka Ray commented that in Bettiah, in Bihar,

good cultivable agricultural land had been found and plots given to a number of refugees from East Bengal while others were kept waiting in camps as plots were being developed. But owing to the agitators who included the members of the opposition political parties who visited these people in the camps, some of the refugees were persuaded to return to West Bengal. At the stage, along with the Minister of rehabilitation of Bihar, I visited the settlement at Bettiah where the agriculturists had been placed and found that the land was far more fertile and far healthier (sic.) than at any place in West Bengal that could have been given to them. Afterwards, I went to the Bihar camps and described the position to the refugees and was able to persuade those who were still at the camps to wait until land was made ready for them...Dr. Roy asked me to give an account of what I had seen. I did so and appealed to the opposition parties to visit the rehabilitation sites and to consider the real interests of the refugees awaiting rehabilitation in this matter. They did so and the result was that the rest of the refugees of Bettiah were able to settle down there.⁶⁰

V

The UCRC, SBBS, PBBS (EIRC) & the Dandakaranya Issue

In 1955, there was a meeting of the Rehabilitation Ministers in Darjeeling where the 'saturation theory' was accepted according to which it was decided that all the possibilities of refugee rehabilitation ended up in West Bengal and on that pretext it was decided that the refugees would have to be sent to outside of West Bengal.⁶¹ Thus, in 1958 the Government of India undertook the Dandakaranya Project for giving economic

rehabilitation to the East Bengali refugees once for all. Jyoti Basu in his memoirs recalled that on 5th July 1957, Bijoy Sing Nahar of the Congress brought a non-official Resolution in the Assembly. On 25 July 1957 while responding to the debate on the Resolution in the Assembly Mr. Basu said,

“We do not even know about the scheme. We have only read some headlines from various newspapers. We cannot make out anything about the Dandakaranya project. We have heard about the area and its size but we have no idea about the collective planning of the project...There is nothing in this that we can welcome though this resolution says that we are all welcoming it- where are the so-called proposals? I think it is utter callousness which has brought about these proposals. I believe that we should work to a certain plan and go step by step. We must earmark who will live where, how many people will be employed in cottage industry, who will go into big industry...We do not have any facts. We are rushing this through. We are being forced to accept that we are welcoming this. We cannot do that.

...We must be told about the what survey has been done, how much money will be spent, what has been the planning. But Mr. Bijoy Sing Nahar is saying nothing. What we say is simple-bring these facts to us and then we can discuss the proposal...

...If you ask me whether I am against the movement of refugees outside the state as a matter of policy, I will continue to say that I have nothing against Bengalis moving out...I do not believe in such a policy but they should go only if you can find an alternative living arrangement for them.

...Gadadhar Dutta, MLA, Orissa Assembly Party secretary-He has said that the Rs 5 crore which is being spent for the last two years for these refugees will go to waste since the areas are inhabitable. His letter has come out in the Newspapers and all of you are aware of it.

...Suddenly in the year 1957, you happen to realize that there were no places for the refugees to stay in Bengal...I am suddenly told that the state has reached a saturation point. Do you know the meaning of the saturation point?...

...We may be making tall claims on India being one but it is a fact that everybody would prefer to live in his own province. I know this is difficult but at least if you had made a fair attempt, then the refugees would have at least felt that you had given it an honest try...

It is taking an extreme position to say that Bengal cannot afford to house a single more refugees. We must try to understand the attitude and the mental state of the refugees first. Many of their experiences outside the state have been bad. If they have to go outside, then they will have to go anyway; but we have to be first satisfied that there is no place for them in Bengal...If Dandakaranya had been such nice place, then the people of Andhrapradesh and Bihar would not have flocked to Calcutta...Since they do not get sufficient food there, these people are rushing in Calcutta and the Industrial belt...we cannot accept this proposal.”⁶²

However, the Government clung to its decision and declared that if the refugees refused to move to Dandakaranya then the camps would be shut down and supply of ‘doles’ would be stopped. But the camp refugees did not pay heed to the Government’s threat and started Civil Disobedience or ‘Satyagraha’ Movement that lasted for about a month, from March 1958 to April 1958 that led to the arrest of 30,000 camp refugees.

In such a situation, the UCRC stood by the camp refugees, strived to bring the refugees of the squatters' colonies on the same platform to turn the movement as a movement of the entire refugee population of West Bengal and overwhelm the Government through sending numerous batches of refugees to court arrest by violating prohibitory orders under section 144 Cr. P.C.⁶³ But the attempt of the UCRC for bringing refugees of camp and the squatters' colonies on the same platform met with failure as the later did not pay heed to the call of the UCRC leaders and thereby the squatters stood aloof.⁶⁴ Thus, the refugees of two distinct wings could not be connected and again the camp refugees got divided into two blocks under the leadership of two different organizations viz. the UCRC and SBBS ('*Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sammelan*')⁶⁵ Furthermore, Jogendra Nath Mandal⁶⁶ who was the Law Minister in the Cabinet of Pakistan Government and in the subsequent period left that portfolio and came to West Bengal took initiative to form another refugee organization. Accordingly, on 9th July 1958 he organized a convention of the refugees at the Mahabodhi Town Hall in Calcutta under the President-ship of Hemendra Nath Dasgupta. In this convention a new refugee organization known as '*Purba Bharat Bastuhara Samsad*' (PBBS) or East India Refugee Council (EIRC) came in to being.⁶⁷ However, the UCRC had been trying to bring together the camp refugees on a programme that would be acceptable to all of them. Accordingly, a 21-point charter of demands was drawn up in a conference that took place in the Cooper's Camp⁶⁸ in December 1957 and was also decided that for the realization of that 21-point charter of demands, a deputation would meet the Chief Minister and the Rehabilitation Minister, those were rejected altogether. In spite of it, the UCRC did not lose enthusiasm and gave a befitting reply by organizing as many as 174 demonstrations of the refugees, between the time period of December 1957 and March 1958.⁶⁹ In the meantime, the UCRC also stood by the camp refugees of Bankura where the refugees started their Satyagraha on 12th March. The SBBS decided to commence Satyagraha on 17th March. But on 12th March, Ambika Chakrabarti, the UCRC General Secretary dispatched a proposal of joint SBBS-UCRC Civil Disobedience Movement to Haridas Mitra, the SBBS leader, that was ruled out by the denial of the SBBS leaders like Jogendranath Mandal, Hemanta Biswas and others. In this way, the ground for a split in the Satyagraha of the camp refugees took shape and the UCRC and the SBBS started the movement separately and the both the organizations put forward the same demands which were as under:⁷⁰

- (1) No unwilling refugee must be sent to Dandakaranya;

- (2) No refugee must be deprived of doles on account of his unwillingness to go outside West Bengal;
- (3) Bynanama disputes must be settled expeditiously;
- (4) As 70 percent of the camp refugees were peasants, they must be settled in West Bengal on reclaimable waste land; and
- (5) New industrial schemes should be initiated for the economic regeneration of West Bengal.

The refugees marched towards the junction of Esplanade East and Old Court House Street and faced arrest on a regular basis during the movement. By 3rd April, Burdwan, 24 Pargans, Nadia and Murshidabad came under the umbrella of the *Satyagraha* where more than thousand refugees observed *Satyagraha* and courted arrest. Under the circumstances, Dr. Roy, on 3rd April, gave a prepared statement to the Press that warned against any attempt to use the refugees of East Bengal for political ends and give rise to lawlessness and disorder in West Bengal. He assumed that the political parties were taking advantage of the refugee situation for their political goal and thereby hindering in the process of the refugee rehabilitation. He further pointed out that the Government had decided to rehabilitate the refugees outside of West Bengal because there had been no surplus land in West Bengal where the refugee peasants could be rehabilitated. Thus, the UCRC planned for a Civil Disobedience Movement on 7th April that was fixed on 30 March, at Poddarnagar by the Grand Council of the UCRC, where about 20,000 refugees would participate. The Government also reacted against the decision by arresting fifty UCRC-SBBS leaders on 6th April; however, the Government failed to prevent the holding of the UCRC rally on the fixed day and after the rally a procession of the refugees marched towards the Writer's Building. But the procession was stopped by the police near the south-west corner of the Curzon Park. On the same day, the SBBS also undertook the similar programme separately.

In this way, both the UCRC and the SBBS from 8th April onwards chalked out various programmes separately for the similar end i.e. the unwilling refugees must not be sent to outside of West Bengal for rehabilitation. The *Satyagraha* continued for long one month. Sadhan Gupta, the Communist MP, termed the Dandakaranya project as an outcome of the fertile imagination of a Muhammad-Bin-Tughlug. M. C. Khanna, the Rehabilitation Minister, in his reply said to the Parliament that the refugees living in the camps of West Bengal were better off in comparison to the average Indian citizens and threw a challenge to them for placing before him either their own scheme of rehabilitation that he would

carefully consider or leave for Dandakaranya. In such a situation, Dr. Roy gave assurance to Deben Sen and three other leaders in a letter that the refugees who were not ready to go to outside of West Bengal would not be forced to do the same and the cash doles that had been stopped due to their unwillingness to go outside of West Bengal would be restored.⁷¹ After the assurance, *Satyagraha* continued for some days and finally the UCRC declared the withdrawal of the *Satyagraha* with effect from 20th April. The PSP followed the footprints of the UCRC, issued a statement to the press and called off the movement with effect from the same day.

Thus, the UCRC and the SBBS became successful in getting the Government promised that no refugees living in the camps of West Bengal would be compelled to go to outside of West Bengal. But they failed to secure any commitment on the part of the Government that the refugees who would not go to outside of West Bengal for rehabilitation would be rehabilitated in West Bengal. And the camps would not be closed down by 31 July 1959.⁷²

The SBBS could comprehend the difficulty and thereby insisted on a joint committee that would search for surplus land for their rehabilitation. The Government thought that even if there was surplus land in West Bengal it would not be politic to execute a plan for the rehabilitation of the camp refugees in the state that might become a causative factor for a new wave of migration from East Pakistan. Even the authorities seemed to think that even the Dandakaranya Project might draw refugees from East Pakistan causing a new wave of migration and as a precaution of that, the system of taking migration certificates for the new migrants from East Pakistan was introduced. However, most of the UCRC members were of the opinion that West Bengal had sufficient surplus land where the agriculturist refugees could be rehabilitated and the non-agriculturist refugees could be rehabilitated by establishing small and large scale industries in the private and public sectors. The UCRC even formulated an 'Alternative Proposal' for the rehabilitation of the refugees' in West Bengal. But Khanna, who challenged to come out with a plan that would identify the surplus land in West Bengal where the refugees could be rehabilitated, refused to meet the UCRC leaders and scrutinize the 'Proposal'. However, Dr. Roy appeared to have gone through it and was even prepared to find out if the schemes mentioned in the proposal were feasible. By August 1958 the 'Alternative Proposal' was submitted to Dr. Roy and circulated to the members of the Assembly. But by then the Dandakaranya Scheme had developed into such an obsession that the Central and the State Governments could not

think about anything different. Even the important News Papers of West Bengal proclaimed that a 'new Bengal was going to rise up in Dandakaranya if the refugees would care to go there and make it their own'.⁷³ The people of West Bengal also thought in the line of the Government that Dandakarany was the only solution to the refugee problem of West Bengal. The Central Committee of CPI was persuaded by Nehru's sincerity to execute the Scheme for solving of a stubborn predicament. The RSP also found the Dandakaranya Scheme to be acceptable while the PSP thought that the Dandakaranya Scheme was not such which could be rejected. Thus, the Left opposition apparently was also convinced by the Dandakaranya Scheme that the Central Government had finally undertaken such a serious plan that was likely to bring solution to the refugee problem. Accordingly, by the winter of 1959 such a situation developed that the Left Opposition to the Dandakaranya Scheme was increasingly getting down. Jyoti Basu wrote a letter to Prafulla Sen, the then Relief and Rehabilitation Minister that they had made it clear on their part so many times that they would not raise objections regarding the refugees who were willing to go to Dandakarany on their own accord even if the rehabilitation programme was undertaken in West Bengal.⁷⁴ Sinha commented that in any democratic movement there remains an issue of bargaining for the purpose of attaining a desired goal. However, a true political skill is the capability to measure the extent of success that can be drawn from the prevailing situation. So, the way following which the arrival of the refugees was going up it was impossible to rehabilitate all of them only within West Bengal any more.⁷⁵ But the UCRC and the Namasudra leaders of the SBBS remained determinedly opposed to the Dandakaranya Project. In such a situation, the SBBS proposed to launch another *Satyagraha* movement with some variation i.e. the *Satyagraha* would continue for some time and if the Government refused to pay heed to their demands then a movement would be started with an objective for the unauthorized occupation of the reclaimable surplus land. However, in the meantime, the UCRC had taken decision that it would not violate the line of the constitutional agitation and under no situation undertake a colonizing movement of the peasants against wills of the people of West Bengal. Besides, the CPI had almost reduced the UCRC as an appendage of the party that was no longer a composite body of the Left democratic parties performing its works through consensus. On 26th October 1958 the UCRC made an announcement that a rally would be held at the Maidan for taking decision about the beginning of a Civil Disobedience Movement on 14th November. Thus, on 2nd November a rally held at the Maidan that was presided over by J.L.Chatterjee and passed a Resolution denouncing the

Dandakaranya Scheme and reiterating the earlier decision to commence 'Direct Action' sine 14th November unless the Government consented to rehabilitate all the 35,000 camp –refugee families within West Bengal . Anil Sinha, Jyoti Basu, Ramkrishna Majumdar and others delivered their speeches. Jyoti Basu expressed that the party would fight tooth and nail against the forced dispatch of the refugees from West Bengal and the other speakers spoke more or less in the same vein. However, the decision regarding the Movement from 14th November was postponed in accordance with the Provincial Committee meeting of the CPI on 4th November.⁷⁶

Finally, the Civil Disobedience Movement started from 7th January 1959 and it assumed the shape of previous Satyagraha i.e. holding rally at Wellington Square, the brief meeting, garlanding groups of refugees who would court arrest at the junction of Old Court House Street and Esplanade East respectively. But the movement failed to attract the popular attention and the Government also seemed to be set on not noticing the movement. The Leftist parties of the UCRC wanted to adopt a policy of confrontation with Government and were in favor of giving a violent orientation to the movement. But the CPI was determined to drive the UCRC along a way that was in conformity with its political line.⁷⁷ Besides, it was clear to the CPI that, 'in view of the prevailing climate of favorable opinion regarding the Dandakarnya Scheme, a purely negative attitude to the scheme and sticking out for the rehabilitation for the camp refugees in West Bengal would be self- defeating.'⁷⁸ The UCRC was also unable to proceed any more under its own steam as by now the CPI was in the complete control of the UCRC.⁷⁹ Thus, the movement was suspended from 18th February 1959.

In this way the movement that was started by the UCRC and also by the SBBS came to standstill though, the UCRC in the subsequent period also continued its opposition of sending the unwilling refugees to the outside of West Bengal i.e. to Dandakaranya. But mission Dandakaranya could not be stopped. The disunity between the UCRC and SBBS and the creation of PBBS must have weakened the movement of the refugees against the Dandakaranya Scheme. Gradually, the refugee families who were residing in the various camps of West Bengal were sent to Dandakaranya. Besides, some refugees who entered into West Bengal during the Indo-Pak war (1964-65) were dispatched there by train directly from the border of West Bengal.⁸⁰

VI

In 1960 M.C. Khanna declared that the main work of rehabilitation has been over and only some residuary works remained to be completed. Accordingly, the residuary work in West Bengal was assessed at about Rs. 22 crores- Rs. 15 crores under loan and Rs. 7 crore under grants. It frustrated the refugee organizations as this sum was too small to solve such a big problem of the refugees and thus, continued their struggle against the negative attitude of the Central Government. Simultaneously, the influx of the refugees from the East Pakistan seemed to be unabated but the Central Government refused to accept them as refugees. West Bengal observed the 3rd August 1961 as a day of protest. On that day a massive procession of the refugees moved towards the Head Quarter of the Rehabilitation Ministry to submit a memorandum to Mr. Khanna who was by then in Calcutta. And when a delegation consisting of the UCRC leaders met him, he admitted in front of the delegation that for the rehabilitation of the East Bengali refugees something more has to be done. In January 1962, another all party delegation consisting of Jyoti Basu, Suresh Banerjee, Hemanta Basu, Ashok Mishra and Samar Mukherjee met Dr. B. C. Roy and M. C. Khanna at the Writer's Building and discussed with them the issue of rehabilitation of the refugees from East Bengal. The delegation also expressed a strong protest against the policy of the Central Government to send the refugees out of West Bengal, especially to Dandakaranya against the will of the refugees.

The Election of 1967 changed the political scenario of West Bengal. This Election replaced the Congress Government and a United Front Government where the Left Parties including CPI (M) were the participants, came to power. The new Government was sympathetic towards the refugees and lent its full support to the demands and proposals raised by the UCRC. The new Government not only objected to the discriminatory policy and the 'residuary theory' of the Central Government but also demanded Rs 250 crores from it to give finishing touch to rehabilitation work. It also established a Fact Finding Committee under the chairmanship of Samar Mukherjee to search out the actual magnitude of the problem. The committee commenced its work through visiting different districts, refugee colonies and centers. But very soon the committee stopped functioning as the United Front Government could run no more. In 1969, the United Front Government again came to power and this time it tried to execute recommendations made by the Fact Finding Committee but the Central Government did not respond. An idea of

the magnitude of the problem can be had from the following passage of the memorandum that was submitted by the UCRC to the Governor of West Bengal on 22nd March 1970.⁸¹

According to the estimate of our organization about 5 million people migrated to the State of West Bengal up to December 1963 and another one million up to December 1966. In our memorandum to the then Governor Shri Dharam Vira in May 1968 we had shown that it is apparent from the Government records itself that 5.80 lakh families did not get any rehabilitation benefits from the Government. This problem has further been accentuated due to the onrush of the migrants which has started very recently and is continuing every day. To solve this gigantic problem is required the strong determination and mobilization of enormous resources and this can only be done if it is taken up on a war footing. The problem cannot be neglected anymore.

Since the very beginning the Government had followed a discriminatory attitude towards the refugees from East Pakistan and it was so glaring that even the Congress Government in West Bengal under Shiddharta Shankar Roy had openly to admit it during the time of the formation of the Master Plan, for the rehabilitation of the displaced persons in West Bengal within five years (1973-1978). And the following passage of the Master Plan goes thus:⁸²

Leaving aside the value of those miscellaneous benefits, the value of financial assistance received by the West Pakistan refugees comes to Rs 341 crores, in addition to Rs 115 crores spent on their direct rehabilitation. Thus the total sum spent on their direct settlement, excluding educational and medical facilities, comes to Rs 456 crores as against Rs 77 crores spent on their direct rehabilitation, excluding educational and medical facilities of East Bengal refugees living in the over congested state of West Bengal. And this too came to them in dribbles. Even if we take into account the amount spent on their direct rehabilitation of 14 lakh of East Bengal refugees settled in other states and Dandakaranya, the total amount spent on the permanent rehabilitation of 52 lakh of West Bengal refugees is very much less than what has been spent on 47 lakh of West Pakistan refugees.

Needless to say that by admitting the object reality, the Master Plan had strengthened and justified agitation of the refugees under the UCRC. The Central Government did not accept the Master Plan but because of the pressure of agitation the Central Government established a 'Working Group' with a view to assessing the magnitude of the problem. The Working Group published its report in 1976 that also confessed the same facts.⁸³

The year 1977 marked a turning point in the political history of India as well as in West Bengal. This year the Congress Government in the Centre headed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi was replaced by the Janata Government and Morarji Desai became the Prime Minister of

India. And in West Bengal the Left Front parties achieved majority and formed the Government. During this time also the influx of the refugees continued. The newly formed Left Front Government took up the refugee problem seriously and as noted in the previous chapter, made a demand of Rs 500 crore from the Seventh Finance Commission for the purpose of the rehabilitation of the Bengali refugees that was turned down by the Centre. But it did not exhaust the endeavor of the refugee leaders. On 24 August 1978 a delegation consisting of Left Front and UCRC leaders met Morarji Desai and submitted a memorandum to him which expressed the then condition of the refugees in the following words:

“Nearly 80 lakhs of refugees have come permanently to settle. Among them about 4.6 lakh families got some benefits haphazardly. The rest about 11.4 lakh families have been kept completely outside any rehabilitation benefits.”⁸⁴

After hearing the memorandum Morarji Desai communicated to them that the problem of the refugees from East Bengal has almost been solved and only some residuary problems existed about those who had been sent out side of Bengal and Dandakaranya. He however, when the delegation asserted him that the major part of the problem was yet to be solved, assured that his Government was ready to reconsider the refugee problem if the delegation could produce reliable facts to the problem. Accordingly the Left Front Government of West Bengal established the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee under the chairmanship of Samar Mukherjee for conducting a thorough survey and preparing a true account of the refugee problem. After doing a field work for more than two years for collecting concrete facts and data the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee prepared a report and submitted it to the State Government on 31 August 1981 which measured that a total amount of Rs 750 crore was needed for complete rehabilitation of the refugees. After accepting the report, the Left Front Government sent it to the Central Government, where the Congress had regained the power, for the purpose of acceptance and implementation that simply did not respond. The West Bengal Government had formed a rehabilitation package for the refugees from East Bengal and it sent the package proposal to the Centre on June 23, 1992 for necessary action. The details of claims in the package proposal were as follows:⁸⁵

Heads	Amount Claimed (in Rs)
(A) For Colonies	

607 group of colonies	5,29,83,820
175 group of colonies	12,27,22,578
149 group of colonies	31,13,467
Jodhpur 'k' site	4,22,00,000
Bhadrakali	1,11,84,000
Development of colonies	4,00,00,00,000
State Government land cost	137,00,00,000
(B) Transfer category	
Land other than state Government	15,00,00,000
Economic rehabilitation	11,50,00,00,000
888 home families	1,00,00,000
Behala tenements	28,06,000
Total cost(A+B)	17,26,50,00,000

But the Central Government had not shown positive response to the sanction of Rs 17,26,50,00,000. And it is evident from the letter which Shri Prasanta Sur, the Minister of Rehabilitation of West Bengal had written to S.B.Chavan, the Home Minister of India, on July 1993. The letter goes as such.⁸⁶

In March 1992 the Government of India in the Ministry of Home Affairs wanted to discuss the pending issues with the State Government including claims for compensation for State Government's lands involved in the regularization scheme for squatters' colonies. Accordingly a team of officials went to New Delhi where a meeting was held on March 10, 1992. In the deliberations the centre seemed to indicate that it was interested in one time settlement of demand for fund for D.P. rehabilitation in West Bengal. Accordingly, the State Government sent its package proposal to the centre for necessary action on June 23, 1992. The package proposal contained a demand for Rs 1726.50 crores on 11 items... On September 9, 1992 a meeting was held in the Ministry of Home Affairs between the Ministry officials and our state officials in this regards. The minutes of the said meeting received in October last revealed that except demand for cost of regularization of 149/175/607 group colonies, other items have not been agreed to so far.

An all party delegation met the Union Urban Minister in regard to the matter of development of colonies in April 1992, but no positive response has yet been received in spite of repeated request.

I wrote to you in the D.O. letter no 120/M/RRR/93 dated 4.3.1993 regarding payment of value of state Government land utilized for rehabilitation of the refugees. The response received from you so far is also not positive.

VII

Refugee Organizations Outside of West Bengal

1. United Refugee Rehabilitation Committee in Tripura

As noted earlier that besides West Bengal the Bengali refugees had also entered into some of the other states within the Indian Union such as Assam, Tripura etc. In Assam the Bengali refugees did not form any particular organization of their own and the UCRC had limited its activities to West Bengal only. In Tripura the refugees from East Pakistan whose number rose to 6, 09, 998 up to 24th March 1971⁸⁷ or about 39.19% of total population⁸⁸ of the State formed a committee called United Refugee Rehabilitation Committee to meet their demands. On 18th May 1952 the refugees commenced a hunger strike in the *Pandal* of Agartala, Durgabari in protest against the decision of the closure of the rehabilitation Department in next July. The hunger- strike was *lathi* charged on the 18th May and it was repeated on 21st May in more violent form that caused serious injury to Mohan Chaudhury. Forty seven hunger -strikers were arrested who continued their hunger strike even in the jail and in course of the hunger strike one of the arrested refugees Shri Bishwambhar Namadas lost his life.⁸⁹ However, the problems of the refugees of East Pakistan in Tripura were considered with sympathy by the State Government in the subsequent period. Many camps were established for temporary relief and many colonies were established for permanent settlement. From 1949-50 up to 25 March 1971 a total number of 1, 15, 389 refugee families was registered and out of those registered families 76,115 families got rehabilitation assistance within the State and 7,065 families were dispersed outside Tripura.⁹⁰

2. The Udbastu Unnayanshil Samiti in Dandakaranya

The refugees who were sent to Dandakaranya they also formed an organization of their own as they were often given inadequate relief supplies and prior to their resettlement

often they had to spend many years in prison camp conditions under corrupt camp administrators. The movement started in the Mana Group of Camps where the refugees had been kept for twelve years as virtual 'prisoners of war' and 'serfs' under the supervision of the military officers.⁹¹ The refugees formed their own organization named *Udbastu Unnayanshil Samiti* (UUS) which demanded for increased rations, the right to work out-side the camp for supplementing rations, and the right to be consulted before being dumped in new sites. They undertook a thirteen day hunger strike that brought to them increased dole but no right regarding resettlement thus placement of refugees in dry and unviable locations continued. In 1974 a second boycott was under taken by the refugees against their dispersal that resulted in deaths from police firing. But it could not stop the agitation and in the next year the organization took the decision to start a national movement for the resettlement of the refugees in the Sunder ban area of West Bengal.⁹²

In this way, the refugee movement that was started in 1950s under the leadership of the UCRC continued in 1960s and 1970s and gave impetus to the larger Left movement in West Bengal. The UCRC on the one hand spearheaded the refugee movement in West Bengal and opposed the Dandakaranya Project on the other hand pressurized the Central as well as the State Government for the regularization of the refugee colonies. In spite of the initial hesitation, both the Central and State Governments adopted an accommodative policy for the refugees till 1971 and in this regard UCRC played an important role. Although, the refugees were not covered by a comprehensive rehabilitation package yet they were allowed to sneak in and were accepted as citizens of India through naturalization.

Though, many refugee organizations came into existence in and outside of West Bengal yet it was UCRC that played the central role for pressing the Government to find out means for solving the problems of the refugees. It constructed such an image of a united and systematic political and economic struggle that was followed in the future course of action even by the political parties of West Bengal.

Notes and references

1. 'The refugees argued that both the state government and the centre owed them a special debt, because the Hindu minorities of Eastern Bengal had deliberately and unselfishly sacrificed their own well-being to create a separate province of West Bengal from which their brethren in the Hindu majority districts had mainly benefitted.' Chatterjee, Joya, 'Right or Charity? The Debate Over Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal, 1947-50', in Kaul, Suvir, (ed.), *The Partitions of Memory; The Afterlife of the Division of India*, Permanent black: Delhi, 2001.p.92.
2. Fraser, Bashabi, *Bengal Partition stories-an unclosed chapter*, Anthem Press: 2008, p.33.
3. *Ibid.*, p.34, Roychowdhury, Bharat Jyoti, *Satchallis Theke Sottar Ebang Aage Pare*, Punascha :Calcutta: 2011, p.315.
4. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *The Marginal Men; The Refugees and the Left Political Syndom in West Bengal*, Naya Udyod: Calcutta, 1999, p.43.
5. The two instances mentioned here may be counted as examples for the anti-Left and pro-Congress orientation of the migrants immediately after Partition:
When Dr. P.C. Ghosh introduced the Security Bill in West Bengal Assembly the CPI and the Socialist Republican Party made a joint front for agitating against what they called the Black Bill. Other Left Parties also opposed the Bill although they did not join the CPI-SRP combination. When Sardar Ballavbhai Patel held a meeting at the Calcutta Maidan and denounced the Left parties, the refugees of the Lake camp and of other nearby camps attacked Leela Roy's (FB leader) house under Congress leadership. The CPI-SRP front and other Left parties proclaimed a general strike. It did not succeed. A meeting organized under the auspices of all the Left parties was attacked by Congress supporters among whom were also refugees.
The general hostility of the refugees of the Lake camp to a family with alleged associations in the past throws a revealing light on the aggressively pro-Congress attitude of the refugees. One night a message reached the CPI shadow District Committee office of Calcutta that the Lake camp refugees had handed over a family living in the camp to the police. Bijoy Majumdar and Haripada Chatterjee, two important party members, were in the district Committee office at that time. B. Majumdar went to the Lake camp to look into the matter. The camp dwellers told him that an anti-Government Communist family was living with them. They apprehended that any association with the Communists would be in the way of their getting rehabilitation. So they handed over the family to the police. *Ibid.*, pp.45-46.
6. *Ibid.*, pp.46-59.

7. Dasgupta, Abhijit, 'The Politics of Agitation and Confession: displaced Bengalis in West Bengal' in Roy, Sanjay K.,(ed.), *Refugees and Human Rights; social and political dynamics of refugee problem in eastern and north-eastern India*, Rawat Publication: Jaipur and New Delhi, 2001, pp.110-111.
8. This terminology was used to mean the amount of relief that was given to the refugees living in the camps in the form of ration or money.
9. Chatterjee, Joya, *op.cit.*, in Suvir, Kaul, *op. cit.*, p.91.
10. Dasgupta, Abhijit, *op.cit.*, in Roy, Sanjay K.,(ed.), *op.cit.*, p.113.
11. Basu, Jyoti, *Memoirs: A Political Biography*, Aniruddha Chakraborty, National Book Agency Private Limited: Kolkata, 1999, p.138.
12. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op.,cit.*, p.48.
13. Fraser, Bashabi, *op.cit.*, p.34.
14. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op.cit.*, p.50.
15. Fraser, Bashabi, *op. cit.*, p.34.
16. Biswas, Kanti, *Samaj Bhabana*, Punascha: Kolkata, 2009, p.201.
17. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op.cit.*, p.52. Biswas, Anil, (ed.), *Banglar Communist Andolan Dalil O Prasangik Tathya (2nd Volume)*, National Book Agency Private Limited: Kolkata, 2003, p.249.
18. Roychowdhury, Bharat Jyoti, *op. cit*, p.320.
19. Chakrabarti, Saroj, *With Dr. B. C. Roy and Other Chief Ministers*, Vol.1, Published by Rajat Chakrabarti, Calcutta, p.113.
20. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op.cit.*, p.55.
21. At the Second Congress of the Communist Party that started in Calcutta in February 1948, B. T. Ranadive, The General Secretary of the Communist Party took initiative to change the party line. The changed slogans were 'The Telengana path is our path', 'This independence is sham' and there was a call for armed struggle. Sen, Manikuntala, *In Search of Freedom: An Unfinished Journey*, Stree: Calcutta, 2001, pp.184-197. Kamal, Mesbah, Chakraborty, Eshani, *Nacholer Krishak Bidroha- Samokalin Rajniti o Ila Mitra*, Progressive Publishers: Calcutta, 2006, p.76. Roy, Khoka, *Sangramer Tin Dashak; 1938-68*, Dhaka, 1986, p.71.
22. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p.76.
23. Debnath, Sailen, *West Bengal in Doldrums*, N.L. Publishers: Siliguri, West Bengal, 2009, p.27.

24. Pal, Babul Kumar, *Barishal Theke Dandakaranya (in Bengali)*, Grantha Mitra: Kolkata, 2010, p.74.
25. SB Collection, S. Series 1037/51/1-Colony Recognition Week was observed in the following way-26 January 1951 Refugee Demand Day; 27 January Refugee Unity Day; 28 January-Mass Signature Collection Day; 29 January Refugee-Anti Eviction Day; 30 January-Refugee and West Bengal Citizen's Unity Day, 31 January-Fund Collection Day, cited in Chakravarty, Gargi, *Coming Out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal*, Bluejay Books: New Delhi, 2005, p.45.
26. Sinha, Anil, *Pashchimbange Udbastu Upanibesh*, Published by Sunil Sinha, Book Club: Calcutta, 1995, p.12.
27. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p.80.
28. Roychowdhury, Bharat Jyoti, *op. cit.*, p. 326.
29. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p.81.
30. Cakravarty, Gargi, *op.cit.*, p.55.
31. Roy, Sabitri, *Badwip*, (in Bengali), Nabpatra Prakashan: Kolkata, 1972, pp. 52-53. Quoted section translated by Krishna Majumdar, cited in *Ibid.*, p.53.
32. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p.82.
33. Deb, Arun, 'The UCRC: Its Role in Establishing the Rights of Refugee Squatters in Calcutta', in Bose Pradip Kumar (ed.), *Refugees in West Bengal: Institutional Practices and Contested Identities*, Calcutta: Calcutta Research Group, 2000, p.66.
34. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p.82.
35. *Ibid.*, p.83.
36. *Ibid.*, p.84.
37. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 24th February, 1951.
38. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p.87.
39. RPAR W/E 13.8.1950 in GBIB 1809-48 (KW) cited in Chatterjee, Joya, *op., cit.*, in Kaul, Suvir, *op., cit.*, p.95.
40. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p.97.
41. *Ibid.*, p.98.
42. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 2nd April, 1951.
43. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101. *Manual of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation*, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta, 2001, pp.49-53.
44. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p. 103.

45. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 30 June, 1951.
46. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p.127.
47. *Ibid.*, p.130.
48. *Ibid.*, p.131.
49. “The CPI gained 75% of the seats in 1952 from the seven most urban districts of West Bengal, viz. Howrah, 24Parganas, Hooghly, Darjeeling, Nadia and Burdwan. It gained 78% of seats from these districts in 1957.” Franda, Marcus, *Political Development and Political Decay in Bengal*, Farma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1970, p.54.
50. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p. 140.
51. *Ibid.*, pp.141-142.
52. *Ibid.*, p.142.
53. *Ibid.*, p.149.
54. *Ibid.*, p.151.
55. *Ibid.*, p.154. In accordance with the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 land could be acquired by the Government at the current market price. Thus, there was a need of the amendment of the Clause 31 of the Constitution for the acquisition of the land at a price lower than the current rate. The UCRC declared it repeatedly that the refugees would pay for their occupied land as per with pre-war rates, and the recognition of the necessity of amending Clause 31 by the report of the Committee of the Ministers was an admission of the view of the UCRC that acquisition of the land at current market rate was not fair.
56. *Ibid.*, p.154.
57. Roy, Renuka, ‘And Still They Come’, in Bagchi, Jasodhara, Dasgupta, Subhoranjan, (ed.), *The Trauma and Triumph- Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, Stree: Kolkata, 2006, p.89.
58. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p.172.
59. *Ibid.*, p.175.
60. Roy, Renuka, *op. cit.*, in Bagchi, Jasodhara, Dasgupta, Subhoranjan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp.91-92. Interview with M. Shah, 2015, Motihari, Bihar.
61. UCRC Executive Committee’s Report, 16th Convention, p.12.
62. Basu, Jyoti, *op. cit.*, p.140-42.
63. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op. cit.*, p.178.

64. Chakrabarti has given two reasons why the squatters did not join with the movements meant for the camp refugees. Firstly, the squatters had already attained their plots of land and thatched houses in the colonies though their hold over land was precarious. However, they knew that in course of time it would formally be theirs either through prescription or purchase. Thus by participating in the movement that was not related to their particular interests they did not want to invite any unnecessary risks. Secondly, the squatters mostly belonged to the petty bourgeois and before migration they had little to do with the camp refugees who were mostly Namasudra peasants and thus now felt no real concern for them. *Ibid.*, pp.178-79.
65. About seventy percent of the refugees who were living in the camps and were under the intimidation to despatch to Dandakaranya belonged to the Namasudra agriculturists. Persons like Jogen Mandol, Hemanta Biswas and Apurbalal Majumdar assumed leadership positions among them but lacked power to develop the administrative apparatus for organizing a movement of significant dimensions and thus had to seek assistance of a powerful political party or refugee organization. These leaders apprehended that any link-up with the UCRC would damage their influence over those vast mass of the camp refugees. They wanted to tie themselves up with such an organization that would help them to - maintain their leadership position among the Namasudra peasants and at the same time build an effective civil disobedience movement against the decision of the Government to send the unwilling refugees to Dandakaranya. It was the PSP dominated '*Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sammelan*' which was considered by them to be fit for fulfilling their desire.
66. According to an account, Mandal 'felt horrified and completely bewildered' by the intensity of the riots of 1950 and 'migrated to India in disgust shame and sorrow'. Lahiri, Pravash Chandra, *India Partitioned and Minorities in Pakistan*, Calcutta, 1964, p.27.
67. Pal, Babul, *op. cit.*, p.101.
68. Cooper's Camp, located in the Ranaghat sub-division of Nadia District was opened in 1950 for giving accommodation to about forty thousand refugees. The camp was declared officially closed in 1962. It is the only ex-camp site in that district and is the biggest ex-camp site in West Bengal. Primarily this was a transit camp as it

- was fixed that from that camp the Bengali refugees would be sent to other provinces of India such as Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Tripura etc. Before its shut down this ex-camp site accommodated 2,096 families and covered an area of 2.5 square miles.
69. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op.cit.*, p.182.
 70. *Ibid.*, p.185.
 71. Mukherjee, Aditya & Mukherjee, Mridula (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Volume Forty Two (1 April-30 June 1958), Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund: New Delhi, 2010, p.356.
 72. Earlier it was declared on the part of the Government that the refugee camps would be closed down by 31 July 1959 for good and the refugee families who were residing in those camps would have to go to Dandakaranya. And those refugee families who would not leave the camps they would be given 6 months of cash doles in a lump and after they would have to fend for themselves.
 73. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op.cit.*, p.192.
 74. Pal, Babul Kumar, *op.cit.*, p.96.
 75. Sinha, Anil, *op. cit.*, p.12.
 76. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op.cit.*, p.199.
 77. *Ibid.*, p.205. However, Babul Kumar Pal has commented in his book that it was not acceptable that because of political cause or capturing power only the CPI did not want to go for violent action, rather it took the decision because of the changed and prevailing situation in West Bengal. Till 1960 a huge number of Hindu refugees entered into West Bengal and among them only 5-6 lacks of people found shelter in the Government camps. The rest were spending their days and nights either in the Sealdah station platforms or under the open sky with miserable condition. In such a situation it was beyond logic to oppose any rehabilitation scheme of the Government. Thus, in the phase of changing situation CPI kept itself aloof from its earlier position. Pal, Babul, *op.cit.*, p. 96-97.
 78. Chakrabarti, Prafulla K., *op.cit.*, p. 205-06.
 79. At the beginning of 1959 Ambika Chakrabati was suspended from the Party and thereby also from the post of UCRC Secretary on the ground of supposed misappropriation of the Government funds. On 2nd February 1959, Hemanta Kumar Bose the UCRC President also resigned on the ground that the CPI held the

- UCRC in its thrall. The resignation of Hemanta Kumar Bose was followed by that of Apurbalal Majumdar (FB) and Santi Ganguly (FB), the two important leaders of the UCRC. Samar Mukherjee and Prankrishna Chakrabarti, CPI party members, became the Secretary and Chairman respectively of the UCRC that meant that the Party had taken over the organization.
80. Sinha, Anil, *op.cit.*, p.16.
 81. Mukherjee, Samar, 'Rehabilitation of the Bengali refugees in eastern and north-eastern India: an unfinished struggle' in Roy, Sanjay K., *op. cit.*, p.140.
 82. Govt. of West Bengal, Master Plan, p.9.
 83. Mukherjee, Samar, *op. cit* in Roy, Sanjay K., *op. cit.*, p.141.
 84. *Ibid.*, 141.
 85. The package proposal of Rs 17,26,50,00,000 was calculated in accordance with the report of R.R. Committee bearing in mind the subsequent price hike *Ibid.*, p. 144.
 86. *Ibid.*, p.143.
 87. Bhattacharya, Gayatri, *Refugee Rehabilitation and its Impact on Tripura's Economy*, Omsons Publications: New Delhi, 1988, p.13.
 88. *Ibid.*, p.13.
 89. Mukherjee, Samar, *op. cit.*, in Roy, Sanjay K., *op. cit.*, p.152.
 90. Bhattacharya, Gayatri, *op., cit.*, p.38.
 91. Mallick, Ross, 'Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 58, No. 1, Feb 1999:104-125; here page106.
 92. *Ibid.*, p.106.