

ple, trade union activists must both oppose the tendency of the established reformist trade unions among government employees to play down the issue of reservations (in the name of maintaining unity) and the tendency of organisations of SC/ST employees to ignore the imperialist onslaught on the workers (in the form of retrenchment, privatisation, etc).

25.1.2000

Political Campaign in Punjab during Parliamentary Elections

— by a correspondent

From the beginning of August 1999 till the first week of September 1999, revolutionary and pro-people forces of Punjab conducted a forceful and active political campaign concerning the parliamentary elections. The Punjab unit of CPRCI(ML) issued a wall poster and a leaflet. These were distributed in huge numbers in areas of influence of the Party, in 11 districts of the state. The Party leaflet for mass propaganda made an effective attempt at explaining and projecting a wide range of relevant issues in a very simple language. The immediate practical alternative projected in the leaflet was based on concrete experience so that the people could easily grasp the contents. The leaflet also briefly touched upon the long-term programmatic aspect of the alternative and provided a brief idea about the people's war path. The content and style of the leaflet not only encouraged Party ranks and followers to distribute it widely for direct mass consumption, but also provided a brief systematic frame for mass campaigners of the organisation.

The focus of the state committee's poster was on building the revolutionary mass movement, with the agrarian movement as its axis, as an alternative to the parliamentary path. It attempted to indicate the immediate concrete manifestations of the above course and direction with hints at the strategic aims and objectives of the movement. The purpose of the poster was to highlight the most essential points of the organisation's propaganda while the leaflet attempted to explain the propaganda points.

While all the mass political papers opposing and exposing the parliamentary path provided guidelines and mass propaganda material, the attempt of *Surkh Rekha*, a revolutionary mass political paper, was most

successful. This paper covered a wide range of issues and topics with concrete arguments and facts to facilitate the task of mass propaganda for mass activists, speakers and campaigners.

One of the articles in the mass paper dealt with various aspects of the Kargil war and the Kashmir issue. Other significant articles included: "The story of loyalty" (of all the parliamentary parties towards the ruling classes); "In the words of big exploiters"; "Crisis days for ruling class politics" marked by compulsions to "keep ideology aside"; "The real status of Indian parliament"; "The need to expose the bloodthirsty teeth of the Indian state behind the smokescreen of parliamentary elections"; "The Punjab election show"; "What is to be made of this poor vote?"; "The parliamentary elections and the revolutionary alternative"; and "Beware of the growing danger of fascist tendencies" in the context of ruling class instability. Yet other articles dealt with "The boundless opportunism of CPI(M)" (and a statement by the CPI-M CC stressing that "Peaceful transition is possible"), "Some significant points about the revolutionary propaganda campaign", "How to integrate the active political campaign with the revolutionary mass movement", and the Indian state's continuity with the colonial past, as testimony to the fact that "Independence is fake".

Mass-political campaign

Lok Morcha Punjab (LMP) and Punjab Agricultural Labour Union (PALU) gave a joint call to expose the reality of elections and to project the revolutionary alternative. A poster and a handbill were printed in huge numbers. Both organisations commonly decided not to organise a single state level gathering as a climax of state level campaign. Instead, it was decided that the mass political campaign will be focussed in villages, towns and urban localities. The secretary of LMP, explaining the reasons for this decision, said, "Usually, the usefulness of a state level function is that it becomes a concentrated expression of the state-level mobilisation and revolutionary mass influence and forces, producing an inspiring effect. The images of the participant organisations get projected. Even the bourgeois press has to take note. But such an activity consumes a very large amount of energy and expenses. The attention of the organisation is focussed on maximising the size of the gathering. In this campaign we gave special attention to the consciousness-based mobilisation, to reach

people at the grassroot level and make them grasp our political message."

Clarifying the aim of the propaganda, education and mobilisation campaign the general secretary of P.A.L.U. said, "With reference to the range of propaganda, education and mobilisation our campaign has two targets. One is to spread our political message extensively, far and wide, through posters leaflets, flag marches, "Jago" marches (a traditional form during which the marchers carry on their heads metallic pictures studded with earthen lamps), wall writings, rallies and audio cassettes. Our second target is to organise intensive propaganda through educative meetings and house-to-house campaigns in our selected work-pockets, so that the mood of the people can be read, and they can be convinced of our political message." On this aspect, the state president of L.M.P. said, "We are to differentiate between propaganda among the masses and propaganda among advanced layers of mass organisations. Lok Morcha will focus its efforts on mobilising and activating those sections who have political consciousness to an extent. Our political message will reach the masses through these sections. We are to make special efforts with the membership of Lok Morcha and its close support-circle, because these sections will be the fulcrum of the campaign."

Although a joint call was given for the political campaign by L.M.P. and P.A.L.U., this did not mean that the campaign would be jointly organised by the two organisations at each and every place. It was decided that campaigns will be jointly organised only in those areas where both of the organisations had their own units. And at such places where the unit of one organisation is much stronger and the other is much weaker, the mass gatherings and so on should be organised in the name of the organisation which has the stronger unit. It should be made clear publicly that the unit of the other organisation has its supportive role in the mass gatherings. The idea behind this decision is that the image of the weaker unit of an organisation should not, in the name of joint activity, be allowed to be unnecessarily inflated by riding on the shoulders of the much stronger unit of the fraternal organisation. If this happens, then the unduly projected image of an organisation in an area inspires excessive expectations among the people of that area. And in due course various developments are sure to bring forth the real capacity and strength of the concerned organisation. Then this unexpected reality (about the strength of the organisation) dampens the expectations and inspiration of the people.

Revolutionary Democratic Front, a platform of technical electricity workers, also decided to organise a campaign and to cooperate with the above-mentioned organisations. This front did not join the L.M.P. and P.A.L.U. as an equal partner. It was not a participant in their joint call. Explaining the reason for this, a leader of the Front said, "There is still a gap between the political level of Revolutionary Democratic Front and that of L.M.P.. The Front has already been exposing the relation of politics of opportunist parliamentary parties with the electricity workers and other people. It has been giving a call to rely on people's organised strength. But there is not an established tradition as yet to conduct political campaigns with so rich and comprehensive a political content as those conducted by the L.M.P.. No doubt, the Front is not a trade union, like the Technical Services Union (T.S.U.). The aim of basic change in social structure and creation of a new revolutionary society is a part of its Declaration. But even so the political level of the Front is not as much as that of L.M.P.. Therefore, during this campaign, the Front cannot address the people from the same political level as L.M.P. can. Educating and raising the political level of our support-base step by step, we will advance further."

Campaign among agricultural labour

According to a report issued by the state organising committee of P.A.L.U., in various parts of Punjab, more than 150 villages were covered by posters and leaflets (jointly issued by L.M.P. and P.A.L.U.) which were pasted and distributed by union activists. In Nakodar (dt. Jalandhar) and Banga (dt. Nawan Shahar) wall writing was done on a big scale. Flag marches were organised in nine villages of Banga area (by 25 members); in 11 villages of Nakodar (by 86 men and women), in eight villages of Khanna (dt. Ludhiana) by 23 members of P.A.L.U. and of the Revolutionary Democratic Front of electricity workers. And in Lehra Gaga (dt. Sangrur), a flag march was jointly organised by L.M.P. and P.A.L.U. in five villages by two tractor-trolley-loads of men and women. Three area conferences were organised by the union in alliance with L.M.P. — in Kusa village (dt. Moga), Nakodar, and Lambi (dt. Muktsar). In the rest of the area the campaign was conducted in the form of meetings and rallies. About 4,000 landless labourers were covered by these mass gatherings.

The report noted that as most of the agricultural labourers are illiterate and suppressed, and the union has a serious shortage of mass leaders and activists, for grassroot level propaganda and mobilisation campaigns the union used to depend on the help of activists and leaders of other advanced mass-political platforms such as the L.M.P. and Revolutionary Democratic Front of electricity workers. But this time the union leadership decided to move in the direction of reducing this dependence on fraternal forces. So it was decided that the propaganda and mobilisation campaign should be conducted by mainly relying on the forces and resources of the union itself, especially in the districts of Moga, Faridkot, Bhatinda, Muktsar and Sangrur. Had it not been so more than 3,000 agricultural labourers could have been mobilised in Muktsar alone. This time about 175 activists and leaders of the union actively and energetically participated in conducting the campaign.

To move on the path of self-reliance, the union leadership organised a round of educative and comprehensive meetings (especially on how to carry the message of the campaign to the common people) of the activists and lower level leaders of the union. In three areas of Bhatinda, Faridkot and Muktsar districts 40 activists and leaders were educated and trained in this round. Similarly, in Nakodar 18 members, and in Sangrur 15 members were included in such meetings. As a result of this preparatory work, there were new glimpses indicating enhanced self-confidence of activists and lower-level leaders of the union.

In Nakodar area, earlier each and every kind of work of the union fell on the shoulders of the union state committee member. This time he could free himself from fund collection and other such activities. These elementary types of activities were organised by the 41-member team without engaging him. As a result, the flag march in the villages by 85 men and women in this area was a step forward. In Lambi town (Muktsar district), the planning and implementation of the conference was handled by the area level leaders themselves, without the engagement of a senior state committee member who previously had to engage himself in such activity in the area. This is a step forward in this area. In Jaito area (Faridkot district) the entire planning of the propaganda campaign was carried out by leaders of the village-level units of the area and was also implemented by them. Another encouraging feature of this campaign was that in some areas, especially Jaito and Moga, lower-level leaders made

special efforts to study and think about the guidelines and propaganda material. They listed out the main points for the propaganda campaign to be conducted by them in the area. Because of this energetic political preparation by the area level leaders, the people were comparatively more impressed by the propaganda of the union and as a result the self-confidence of these leaders was enhanced. Previously they, like all other lower-level leaders, used to think that mental labour such as studying, thinking and writing, is to be done only by the higher level leadership, and that they are only to implement the agendas thought out by the higher leaders. Now they started to think that this type of work should not be limited to the higher level leaders, but that they too are capable to an extent to do such work.

During the conferences, usually there is a problem of repetition of the same points by various speakers. Where there are a large number of speakers, people sometimes begin to get bored by such repetition. In a conference, after the speech of a state-level leader, the lower level leaders face difficulty in making out what is left for them to speak about.

The report of the union says that, apart from this common problem, there is another difficulty. As the lower-level leaders of the union are illiterate, their sphere of knowledge and information is limited. And being from the most oppressed sections, usually they feel that only the literate or white-collar leaders are capable of making speeches on stage. During this campaign, an attempt was made to tackle this problem in one area conference. In the Lambi area conference, the state leadership paid particular attention to preparing the speakers well. Topics were reserved for each speaker, and material was provided for each topic to each speaker. The speakers were made to disengage themselves one night before the conference to make political preparation for their speech. (Earlier, they used not to spare any time from their field engagements to prepare their speeches.) The results were quite good. Despite there being nine speakers, there was no repetition or boredom. The diffidence and inferiority complex in the lower-level leaders of the union with reference to stage performance is giving way step by step. A labourer who sang from the stage, "I am proud of the fact that even a dirt-covered man like me is getting a chance to sing a song from our stage." The man was a cement shop labourer, and his face and tattered clothes were badly soiled with cement dust.

The union report made another point. It said that usually in the union, the conception of organising a mass meeting is that the leader/leaders speak, and the participating people are only to listen. But as long as the people do not raise any questions or do not make any comments with reference to the agenda of the meeting or with reference to the talk or speech given by the leaders, the inner doubts of the people cannot be cleared. So the union is trying to train itself to conduct the mass meetings in a manner such that people can be got to speak their hearts. The union could make a breakthrough in this respect at a few places during this campaign. In a village-level mass meeting in Jaito area, many people raised questions regarding the use of the word "Harijan" by union leaders while addressing the meeting. Instead of getting diffident or confused, the union leaders first patiently heard each and every question, and then answered every question confidently. As a result the people were convinced with the views of the union leaders, in spite of the fact that previously they were under the influence of BSP. Similarly, in Lambi area, some meetings were successfully conducted in question and answer form.

In Sangrur district, when a union leader was addressing a rally of agricultural workers, some persons belonging to BSP were present in the audience. Because the union leader was speaking against each and every parliamentary party, they planned that they would not allow him to speak against the BSP. The speaker got wind of their objection and plan. While speaking from the stage, he addressed these persons, saying, "My brothers! I will certainly express my views about the opportunist and anti-agricultural labour character and policies of BSP before the people (citing many concrete examples of such deeds and policies), but you are my brothers, and immediately after this rally we would sit together and have a friendly dialogue to understand each other". After the rally the speaker tried to locate those persons to sit with them for the exchange of views, but the people around said that all the points raised by him were entirely correct, and those persons having objections had already escaped from the rally.

During the parliamentary elections, parliamentary parties try their utmost to divert the attention of the people from their real issues and par-

ticularly from the mass revolutionary struggles. So in order to effectively counter the parliamentary parties and their election campaign, revolutionary forces try to unleash or step up revolutionary mass struggles during the election campaign period. Two struggles during this election campaign period are worth mentioning. One is a struggle activity of the P.A.L.U. and the second is a struggle of an organisation of the landed peasantry, B.K.U. (Ekta).

A state-level leader of P.A.L.U. was implicated in a false case of murder of a landlord. This landlord of village Manawan (near Moga) had tortured to death two landless labourers. A successful four-month struggle sent this rich and influential landlord behind bars. This struggle was fought under the leadership of an action committee of revolutionary and pro-people forces. P.A.L.U. had played a most energetic and effective role in this agitation. Later on the landlord succeeded in getting out of prison on bail. In the meantime, an armed squad of a left adventurist communist revolutionary group murdered the landlord. This development gave an opportunity to the Punjab police and the landlord's family to retaliate against the leadership of P.A.L.U.: the leader of P.A.L.U., who was the most effective leader of the agitation against the landlord, was included in the F.I.R. of the murder case.

Before these parliamentary elections, P.A.L.U. was struggling to get its leader rid of this false case. As the struggle was going on, the union leader did not surrender before the police. A writ petition was also filed in the High Court. During this election period it was decided that, in case the High Court does not order the cancellation of the false case, the union leader would surrender in the Moga district court after a massive demonstration in the town. After the demonstration a few hundreds of members and activists of the union would organise a continuous sit-in before the police station to struggle against the possible torture of the union leader by the police under the pretext of the investigation of the murder case.

The call for this demonstration was given jointly by P.A.L.U. and Palledar Union (Independent) — an organisation of foodgrains loading workers. The propaganda and mobilisation campaign conducted for this demonstration and round-the-clock sit-in became an integral part of the political campaign for the exposure of parliamentary politics. More than 1,000 people marched angrily on the streets of Moga. They were demanding the cancellation of the false case registered against their leader.

Many of them came prepared to stay in town for many days, according to the demand of the situation (bringing their make-shift kitchen arrangements along with them). Due to misinformation about the decision of the High Court, the union leaders wrongly declared that the false case against the union leader had been ordered to be cancelled. Therefore the warranted union leader did not surrender at the district court. The demonstration was concluded by giving a memorandum to the district authorities.

Although some fraternal organisations gave some support for this action, P.A.L.U. mainly relied on its own forces and resources for propaganda and mobilisation at the grassroot level, finances, transportation and practical arrangements for demonstration and planned, continuous, round-the-clock sit-in at Moga. As a result, the overwhelming majority of demonstrators were landless labourers.

Landed peasantry front

The tactic of countering the ruling class parliamentary election with mass revolutionary agitations was successfully implemented in the landed peasantry front. In Punjab B.K.U. (Ekta) is the only landed peasant organisation which takes the stand of non-participation in parliamentary elections. Two other splinter groups of B.K.U. and the front organisations of the revisionist parties allied themselves with parliamentary parties. When the parliamentary elections were declared, even in the leadership of the B.K.U. there was a small section which indicated its intention to support the ruling party (Akali Dal - Badal) in these elections. Though other sections of the leadership were in favour of the stand of non-participation, some of them had a soft corner for, and an unholy alliance with, this pro-Akali section of the leadership. This was due to narrow, sectarian considerations in the context of sharp inner-union struggle going on at that juncture. Though these sections with a soft attitude towards the pro-parliamentary tendency in the union are under the influence of revolutionary politics, they were not prepared to focus the attention and energy of the union on stepping up the peasant struggles wherever possible to effectively counter the election campaign of the ruling class parties. So it fell on the shoulders of a correctly oriented and determined revolutionary section of the union to represent the revolutionary response of the landed peasantry towards the parliamentary parties, and to handle the following inter-connected tasks:

i) Making sure that, in order to counter the pro-parliamentary tendency in the union, the official stand of the union, ie non-participation, is properly projected in the press and public. (The stand of the union is that it will not participate in elections, either in the form of putting up its own candidates to contest elections, or in the form of supporting any other parliamentary candidates. Members of the union are free to vote for any candidate or not to vote at all. But the leaders of the union are not allowed to canvas for any candidate even in their personal capacity.)

ii) Stepping up the ongoing struggle of the union concerning the suicide of a peasant under the burden of debt. A peasant of Budhlada area of Mansa district committed suicide when his entire 4.5 acres of land were acquired by a usurer (commission agent). The union fought an agitation against this tragedy, and compelled the police to register a criminal case against the commission agent for being responsible for the peasant's suicide. But the police was not arresting the commission agent, because of his political clout. So the struggle was going on with three demands (1) the culprit should be arrested and punished according to the law; (2) the land acquired by the commission agent should be returned to the peasant's family; and (3) the commission agent should give Rs five lakh as compensation to the family of the peasant.

iii) Integrating the election exposure campaign with the propaganda and mobilisation for the pressing issues of the peasantry, particularly the propaganda and mobilisation campaign on the burning and most pressing issue of the debt-trap which is taking the shape of a death-trap for many peasants in Punjab. This later campaign was already taking shape before the announcement of elections.

iv) Playing a leading role in making this agitation successful as far as possible.

The correctly oriented revolutionary section of the leadership of the union almost correctly and successfully handled all the above-mentioned tasks. After sufficient homework and preparation within the union, pressure was built on the pro-parliamentary section of the leadership. As a result members of this section preferred to keep quiet, hibernate, and cancel their plans of supporting the Akali Dal candidates in these elections. A series of press statements and a leaflet were issued. This stand of non-participation was sufficiently projected and any doubts about the union's possible support for any parliamentary party were thoroughly

cleared. Such doubts were created by a statement of the president of the union from the stage of a ruling Akali Dal conference that he fully supports the policies of the ruling party.

On the other hand, among the peasantry sympathy and concern for the peasant's family was pouring in. The peasants were searching for an outlet for their pent-up hatred of the widespread system of usury and exploitation of the peasants through it. While the leaderships of other peasant organisations, namely B.K.U. (Lakhawal) and B.K.U. (Rajewal) as well as the kisan sabhas under the leadership of the revisionist parties kept mum, B.K.U. (Ekta) responded to the feelings of the peasant masses. This is why the masses responded with overwhelming enthusiasm.

The state committee of the union decided that the agitation for the demands concerning the peasant's suicide would be stepped up and a rail roko agitation would be launched on August 30 (five days before polling in Punjab). It was decided that though the neighbouring district units of the union would take part in and mobilise support for the agitation, the district committee of Mansa alone would be authorised to command the agitation. This decision sealed off the possibility of undue interference by that section of the state leadership which often takes a "go-slow" stand whenever the opportunity for a militant peasant struggle arises.

The correctly oriented section of the leadership exerted its full efforts in its pockets of influence in all districts to make the agitation successful, while integrating this struggle with the exposure of parliamentary elections. During this campaign, some important steps were taken to regularise the process of education, through a series of meetings of groups of comparatively advanced peasant activists to project the revolutionary understanding about the question of usury and about the parliamentary path. The process of organising such groups, outside the framework of the union, and based on the revolutionary understanding about the landed peasants' movement and organisation, had already been initiated before the announcement of elections. For this purpose, relevant written material was provided. The content of these meetings was as follows: The necessity and importance of formation of such groups of peasant activists outside the framework of the union, and the correct approach about their conduct towards and relation with the union; explanation of the root cause of the problem of usury and debt-trap, and its solution; the placing and importance of struggle against the bloodthirsty usurer (commission

agent) and the authorities in Mansa district; the diversionary and splittist role of elections for parliamentary institutions; the new economic policy and the role of ruling class parties and governments.

Steps were also taken during this campaign to enrich the content of the propaganda, to adopt a rousing style of propaganda, and to enhance the role of village level teams of leaders and activists of the union. All this was done to improve the method of approaching the people, which is prevalent in the union. In all the areas of influence of the union in Bhatinda and Moga, successful attempts were made to mobilise the peasants through educative meetings and flag marches. In one block of Bhatinda district, a propaganda team of eight to ten members of peasant leaders and activists organised a flag march covering 16 villages in two days. About 800 peasants were addressed through meetings of one and a half to two hours' duration. Usually it is believed that night meetings are a difficult task, as a large section of the villagers are generally under the influence of liquor at the time. But during this campaign, about 150 peasants, including 35-40 women, heard the peasant leaders for about two hours at night and yet the peasants were not willing to disperse even when the announcement was made that the meeting had been concluded. In another block of the district, a flag march was organised in 14 villages and about 500 people were covered through educative meetings. Similarly, in Moga district, in all areas of influence of the union, flag marches and mass meetings were organised, which got an encouraging response from the people. In Budhlada block of Mansa district alone, the message of the union was conveyed in about 80 villages, as well as other parts of the district. Strong village units tried to convey the programme of agitation to the peripheral villages.

On the fixed day of blocking the rail traffic at the Budhlada railway station (August 30), the authorities sealed off all the routes to the town by deploying a large number of police forces. But the leadership of the union, foreseeing such preventive steps of the authorities, had planned in advance how to neutralise these steps. It was planned that the detachments of peasant fighters coming from various districts would gather at a safe place outside the area encircled by police forces. Then, in the form of bigger detachments, they would march to a fixed place on the railway track, forcibly pushing through the police force lines blocking their route to the destination. In case of arrest of the peasants, whenever they would

be released, instead of returning to their villages they would rush towards their pre-planned destination to block the rail traffic.

On the day of the rail roko, there was a heavy police deployment on a canal bridge to block the route of the agitators a few kilometres from Bhikhi town. The peasants who came from Bathinda, Moga, Ludhiana and Patiala districts, as well as from Mehal-Kalan and Bhawanigarh blocks of district Sangrur gathered a few kilometres away from the canal bridge. The leadership held a short meeting at the spot and assessed the situation. They then decided to collectively rush towards the canal bridge blocked by the police forces. After giving an ultimatum of 10 minutes, the agitators broke through the lines of the police forces raising militant slogans, and dismantled the barricades. After crossing the bridge, the agitators began to march on the road to their destination. The police forces were in a fix. They were not allowed by the higher-ups to use force with impunity, because it was a peak period of the election campaign, and any act of severe repression of the peasantry was liable to cost the ruling combine very dearly in terms of electoral calculations. And without severe repression it was almost impossible to stop the onward march of the agitators. So the helpless policemen could do nothing except march ahead of the agitators. After walking some distance, the agitators came to know (from a milestone) that their destination was still 13 km away, so they got into their vehicles. Now the bloodthirsty police hounds, under the compulsions of the peculiar political situation, acted like peaceful "satyagrahis" to stop the vehicles carrying the agitators. They formed a human chain across the road in front of the vehicles to stop them. So the agitators had to alight from their vehicles and had to march again on foot, following the police contingent marching in front of them. After walking a few kilometres, an overweight police officer got exhausted and out of breath, so he got into his vehicle. The peasant leaders immediately gheraoed his vehicle and warned him that either he should come out of his vehicle on his own and walk along with the agitators, or the agitators would drag him out and make him walk. The officer responded immediately, alighted from the vehicle, and began to drag his body along somehow or the other.

A section of the agitators, while marching, began to arm themselves with branches of roadside trees, thus signifying their angry and confrontational mood. Thus, covering the whole of the more than 13 km route on foot, and making the policemen and officers walk along with them, foil-

ing all of the preventive police arrangements in Budhlada town (where the rail track was to be blocked), a strong detachment of agitators captured the railway track and declared that the blockade of rail traffic would continue till the fulfilment of their demands.

The news of the breaking of the barricade at Bhikhi and of the entry of a large number of peasants into Budhlada spread among the peasants waiting at various other barricades. Hearing the news they too took courage. The peasants of Sunam and Lehra Gaga blocks of Sangrur district and of Budhlada block of Mansa advanced to smash the police barricade and enter the city. Now the peasants in their hundreds collected just 200 yards away from the railway level crossing.

Higher officers of the district police attempted to divert the peasant mass towards the grain market. But the peasant leaders were alert to this tactic. The Sangrur district president and the Mansa district general secretary called for the peasants to flood the railway track, which they quickly did. They pushed away the police parties standing in the way like mere weeds. Within seconds the railway level crossing and the railway track had been seized by the peasants.

As the authorities could not afford the closure of rail traffic on an important route (Bhatinda-Delhi), they were eager for negotiations. But the peasant leaders placed a condition for negotiations: all of the union leaders and peasant agitators arrested at various places in the police operation should be released immediately. The released leaders should be transported to the site of the rail blockade so that the negotiating team may meet them and do the required homework before negotiations. This demand was immediately fulfilled by the authorities. After negotiations for a few hours, the authorities agreed to all the three demands, but were not willing to sign a written agreement regarding the accepted demands. So there was a possibility of their backtracking. An important section of the negotiators of the union did not prove equal to the demands of the situation. The situation was in fact very favourable: The peasant agitators were exhibiting utmost determination and spirit of sacrifice to get their demands fulfilled. After walking a long distance, they had begun the rail blockade in the evening, and continued it for about six hours. They were tired and hungry. Some of them, while lying down for a brief rest or nap, were particular in guarding the railway tracks by resting their heads on the rail track. They were fully prepared to continue the blockade in-

definitely and face police repression of every kind. Electoral considerations made it difficult for the ruling party combine to order severe repression on the peasants to save an usurer (commission agent). So much more could have been achieved out of this favourable situation, had the peasant negotiators shown more determination and more astuteness about the prevailing situation. When it was announced that all the demands of the union were accepted the agitators returned home overflowing with enthusiasm. (After the agitation and the elections, the accepted demands were partially fulfilled, but the commission agent is yet to be arrested.)

The peasants, by refusing to be afraid of the police guns, and by reaching and blocking the railway track, relying on their organised fighting force, gave a loud call through their agitation during the peak period of the election campaign of the ruling class parties, that the issues for the peasantry are other than those projected by the parliamentary parties as their election issues; that the aspirations and intentions of the peasantry are opposed to the sweet wishes of the parliamentary parties and ruling classes; that the course of resolving the issues of the peasantry is other than the parliamentary path. Apart from the Akali-BJP ruling combine, even the other ruling class parties failed to offer even an iota of support to the peasants' cause.

Some more positive indications were noted during this struggle. Wherever the message of this agitation had been effectively projected, layers of the debt-trapped poor peasantry were attracted towards the union. Selected peasant fighters began to emerge as notable peasant leaders. Old units of the union began to gain strength and new ones are coming into being, or new contacts formed far and wide. These are the indications of the beginning of a process of ending the situation of stalemate which has prevailed in the union for a long time; and of renewing the leadership. But there is still very much to be done to stabilise and increase the pace of this process. Seeing the indifferent and cruel attitude of the rulers, the confrontationist mood of the peasantry, particularly the lower layers of the peasantry, is getting more and more glaringly indicated. This situation is conveying the message for the peasant leaderships that they should enhance their ability and mental preparedness to effectively lead the protracted and sharp struggles for which the situation is already very demanding.

Another mobilisation campaign was organised by Moga and Ferozpur district units of B.K.U. (Ekta), in the adjoining area of the two districts. This campaign was to save a peasant family which was being crushed under a debt to Punjab and Sind Bank. The story of the family was truly heart-rending. The family took a loan of Rs 65,000 from the bank in 1981 for poultry farming. Half of this loan was returned in due time. Then the poultry farm had to be closed under the threats of Khalistani terrorists. The peasant family took another loan of Rs 1.5 lakhs from another branch of the same bank, and purchased a harvester combine for Rs 3 lakhs. This harvester met with an accident and had to be sold as scrap for Rs 50,000. This Rs 50,000 was deposited in the bank as an instalment of the loan. Upto 1995-96, the outstanding loan from two branches of the bank had increased to Rs 5 lakhs and Rs 13 lakhs. The bank had been continuously threatening to acquire the whole of the land and even the residence of the family. Once a public announcement was made for the auction of the house, and the family members were made to vacate the house. Now the peasant family of 65 members was left with only 8.5 acres of land. This land too had been attached by the bank. Under the mental burden of the coercive and publicly humiliating behaviour of the bank, and the fear of becoming homeless and landless, the head of the family and his two young sons died one by one during these agonising years. The remaining two sons fell victim to heart disease and diabetes. The family approached various government functionaries and so-called peasant organisations for relief and help, but in vain. After nearly giving up all hope, the family approached the B.K.U. (Ekta) leaders.

The union, after investigating the case, decided to organise a propaganda and mobilisation campaign in Moga district, to be concluded in the form of a sit-in in front of the Moga branch of the bank on September 2, 1999 (three days before polling in Punjab). An effective article was prepared by the Moga district unit of the union, projecting the standpoint and approach of the correctly oriented section of the leadership of the union. Educative meetings of the peasant activists, as well as mass meetings, were organised on the problem of debt, combined with the exposure of parliamentary elections (as described earlier in this report). Because of the Prime Minister's visit on September 2, the sit-in had to be postponed. After the elections, on September 20, about 500 peasants held the sit-in for the whole day and blocked traffic on the bank road, and then marched

through the town. The bank authorities, while justifying their attempts at recovery of the loan, indicated they would reduce the accumulated arrears of the loan. (According to the latest information, the regional manager of the bank has agreed to cut short the amount of Rs 18 lakh to Rs 6 lakh.)

Campaign of Lok Morcha Punjab

As mentioned earlier, L.M.P. (in alliance with P.A.L.U.) decided not to organise any state level political conference during this campaign. The state committee of L.M.P. instructed its units to adopt various forms of propaganda and mobilisation suitable to the capacity of the units and local conditions. But it was necessary to concentrate the campaign at the grassroots level. So it was mandatory for every unit to paste the wall posters, distribute house to house the handbill jointly issued by L.M.P. and P.A.L.U., and to conduct the preparatory and educative meetings of the members of L.M.P., followed by mass-contact activity in any form. This campaign was organised at about 13 centres in various districts of the state. In most of these centres, apart from the pasting of wall posters and distribution of the handbill, mass mobilisations and education were conducted by house-to-house campaigns, small group meetings, flag-marches, and public rallies. Area conferences were organised at five centres.

From a brief report of an advanced unit (Bhatinda) of L.M.P., the direction, approach and method of the Morcha can be seen concretely. This unit planned to mobilise and educate all sections of people in the town, as well as a few nearby villages. But it was decided to give particular attention to reaching the city poor and factory labour, and to form and increase the Morcha's links with them. To achieve this purpose, it was decided that a conference should be organised in a particular locality of city poor which is adjacent to the workers' localities. Apart from distributing thousands of handbills issued by the state committee of L.M.P., a handbill in Hindi for workers was issued by the local unit. Similarly an additional poster was issued by the local unit. Five hundred copies of a slogan in bold letters were printed for the members and supporters of the Morcha to fix on the gates of their houses. The slogan read: "Elections are a stunt of leeches, only the war for the rights of the people will liberate the people." Wall writing was done in the localities of the city poor

and workers. Wall writing was also done in Hindi, keeping in mind the migrant labour from Hindi-speaking states.

A listing of essential reading material had already been issued to the members of the Morcha. The membership was urged to study this material. A round of schooling was organised before the beginning of the mass campaign. Speaking about the content of the schooling, the president of the local unit of the Morcha said: "Propaganda about elections includes many issues. Generally we have to propagate about all these issues. But we have selected four issues which required special emphasis during this campaign: First, the exposure of parliamentary parties has already been sufficiently done. But the people have many illusions about parliamentary institutions. So we tried to equip ourselves as well as members of the Morcha for the propaganda on this point. Second: in this situation of increasing instability, both opportunities and dangers are coming into being. We tried to depict a concrete picture of the dangers to sharpen its realisation. Third: The issue of Kargil was a particularly diversionary issue. Its reality should be brought forth. We should be cautious about the situation of heightened national chauvinism and be particular about how to convince the people on this sensitive issue. Fourth: comparatively more efforts should be made for projecting the alternative than for exposure propaganda. For this purpose the action programme of L.M.P. should be explained and projected among the people." Due to the shortage of time in the preparatory meetings the action programme could not be discussed. Attempts were made to remove this shortcoming by discussing this point with selected activists during the campaign.

Propaganda teams of the members of the Morcha under the leadership of members of the executive committee were formed and deployed in various localities of the town. A mobile team was also formed to help any propaganda team as and when required. The office of the Morcha was opened in the locality where the conference was to be held.

The mass campaign was initiated by a flag march for two days (August 14 and 16). About 100 members and supporters of the Morcha participated in this march. The August 14 march covered the city's poor and the workers' localities. Seven speakers addressed about 250 people in the rallies held during the march. During the August 16 march, about 300 people, middle sections and workers, were addressed in rallies. After that there was hectic activity of mass meetings. About 1,350 people (men,

women and youth) were covered through this campaign of mass-dialogue. About 74 per cent of them were from basic classes (factory workers, city poor, landless labour and peasants). A contingent of young activists of the Morcha was a notable feature of this campaign. A group of girl students not only made contacts among young girls in the town but also addressed the meetings of the rural women. Again on August 29, a group of about 87 members and supporters of the Morcha, riding tractor trollies decorated with banners and flags of the Morcha, organised a flag march in the localities and market places of the town and three adjacent villages, and addressed about 500 people in rallies on the way.

On September 1, 1999, a Lok Morcha conference was held in a locality of city poor and factory workers. A contingent of migratory factory labour came to the conference raising slogans of the Morcha in Hindi. They attracted the attention of all. One person commented, "The way they had memorised the slogans of the Morcha, the seriousness with which they came to the conference, the attention with which they heard the speech, all of this indicated the seriousness with which the campaign among them had been organised." This conference was addressed by the president and general secretary of the state committee of the Morcha, as well as by the leaders of the local unit. As was commented by an observer, this was a political conference in the real sense. While one of the speakers fully exposed the present political system and depicted the outline of the new society at the programmatic level, another speaker projected the immediate alternative by taking concrete examples. And still another projected the alternative by explaining the demands included in the action programme of the Morcha.

Electricity workers

Revolutionary Democratic Front (R.D.F.) of technical electricity workers organised a political campaign among electricity workers in seven circles of Punjab State Electricity Board (P.S.E.B.). Here is a brief report of an exemplary specimen of the campaign in Ropar circle.

First of all, a circle level meeting of the leaders and activists of R.D.F. was organised for their education and preparation. A state-level leader of R.D.F. conducted a thorough discussion in the meeting on the following questions: Which classes are served by the present exploitative system? What is the state and how does it work? What is the meaning of the term

“people”? Which are the real issues of the people? Which are the basic issues? What is the issue of land and how will it be solved? What is the real common interest of the parliamentary parties and why are there contradictions and conflicts between them? What should the people do now? etc, etc. Similarly, educative and preparatory meetings of members and activists of R.D.F. were organised at divisional and sub-divisional levels of the circle before initiating the mass campaign. Thus this satisfactory homework has expressed itself in the effectiveness of the mass political campaign. In all the sub-divisions of Morinda division, from 40 to 60-70 electricity workers attended the rallies of R.D.F.. About 400 people were directed approached in the Ropar circle through this mobilisation and education campaign. In the seven circles of P.S.E.B., the political campaign was organised on the same pattern, though the level of the political content and sweep of the campaign may not have been exactly the same as that of the above-mentioned specimen of the campaign.

Moulders' and Steel Workers' Union (M.S.W.U.), an established union of factory workers of Ludhiana, also actively organised a campaign among factory workers and city poor in its own way. The union had two choices about the platform from which the campaign was to be launched. One choice was that the union should make a common platform with any mass political organisation such as Lok Morcha Punjab. The result of this choice would have been a campaign with comparatively higher political content but with comparatively narrow mass approach. Because there were certain mass organisations of workers in the city who did not have a political level high enough to join with a mass political platform such as L.M.P.. The second choice was that M.S.W.U. should organise such a platform for election exposure whose level of political content gives scope for the mass organisations with comparatively lower political level to join it. The benefit of this second alternative was that there could be a campaign with wider mass reach, though with comparatively less political content. The union preferred this second alternative. A joint platform was organised by M.S.W.U., a trade union of hosiery workers, an organisation of women (workers), and an organisation of a locality of factory workers and city poor. The mass campaign was launched by distribution of handbills, pasting of wall posters, door to door campaigns, mass meetings, flag marches and a big mass gathering at the end.

Some observations

Lok Morcha Punjab is dominated by middle class activists. Though the programme and direction adopted by the Morcha require that it should vigorously try to extend its cadre base and mass support base to the basic sections of the people, there remains, due to the domination of middle class activists, an objective possibility of a tilt towards middle sections. In such a situation the overwhelming participation of basic masses in the gatherings of L.M.P. is an achievement.

* This campaign helped to proceed further in replacing the result-oriented, performance-oriented and form-oriented source of inspiration for most of the revolutionary activists of mass fronts who joined in the campaign. The progress was reflected in the evaluating remarks made by these activists at different places, indicating a process of change in evaluation parameters. They showed growing concern for politically significant features of the campaign, including the contents of the propaganda, the class composition of the gatherings, etc., in their account of the performance. Did exposure of institutions get proper placing? Was the alternative projection up to the mark? Did the main heading of a certain leaflet fully convey the central message of the campaign? The discussions and reviews of the campaign reflected a variety of such concerns. They themselves got satisfaction from the hard labour they had done to be properly equipped for the campaign tasks. Their realisation about these limitations was influenced by the growing awareness about the real needs for advancement of the revolutionary mass movement. For example, at some places, activists noted that there was not enough clarity in order to effectively project the revolutionary alternative in a convincing manner.

* The attempts at concretising the alternative in the form of demands and slogans got good results. At some places the action programme of the L.M.P. was utilised successfully for this purpose. Concrete, day-to-day, burning problems of different sections of the people were linked with significant and/or basic demands mentioned in the action programme. These concrete demands were put in sharp contrast to the utter lack of any solution to people's problems in election manifestoes and propaganda of ruling class parliamentary parties. Wherever such a method of propaganda was implemented the campaign acquired an "offensive character",

in the words of one revolutionary activist.

Where the ruling class parties' election campaigners came face-to-face with revolutionary campaigners, their bankruptcy got glaringly exposed. They were forced to escape from open discussions; they were silenced; they got provoked; they pretended to appreciate or agree with the revolutionary activists; or they left the place immediately without facing the public gatherings.

* Priority to mass meetings before, or along with, rallies or large gatherings, was also a notable feature of the campaign. It indicated that the activists realised the need to get close to the masses and have a dialogue with them. There were good indications of curiosity to know the mood, apprehensions and questions of the masses. The process helped the activists to confront their limitations face-to-face regarding properly answering the questions and satisfying the masses. Although there is a long way to go in learning to master this art, the preliminary concern noted at some places is encouraging.

* The proper methods, forms, language and tone of the propaganda proved its effectiveness in some cases.

— In a village of Moga district, activists of P.A.L.U. and L.M.P. set up their polling-exposure booth under a tent on behalf of the two organisations, just next to the polling stations and booths of the parliamentary parties. The P.A.L.U.-L.M.P. booth was decorated with slogans and banners of the union and the Morcha, and a big cartoon depicting the parliament as a den of pigs. There was a big chart of 30 demands of the people, asking parliamentary parties, "Have you any solution for these demands?", and "If you have not, how are you entitled to the votes of the people?" A section of the village people who came to cast their votes also went on visiting the poll-exposure booth, and heard attentively the propaganda exposing the polls. Thus a stream of people continued to visit the booth the whole day. Some persons of the village who came to cast their votes changed their mind after visiting the polling-exposure booth, and returned without casting their votes.

— An activist of the Morcha played an audio cassette of speeches of

a very effective speaker of the Morcha through a sound system placed on his bicycle, in the streets of two villages. Groups of villagers gathered at each stop of his bicycle and heard the cassette very attentively. So effective was this form that people wanted to buy the cassette. The activist immediately arranged for multiplying recordings of the cassette, and more than five dozen cassettes were bought by the people like hotcakes. Even a priest of the gurdwara (Sikh temple) in the village commented, "This cassette is worth playing in the gurdwara every morning and evening." This experience showed how even a single person can launch an effective mass propaganda campaign.

* A handbill presenting the campaign message in a simple and convincing style so impressed the women staff of a school that they did not go to cast their votes.

* Wherever the relative significance of propaganda points was clearly indicated, it helped in maintaining the proper focus at nodal points.

Response of the people to the campaign

The people's disgust with ruling class parties was clearly reflected during the interaction of revolutionary activists with the masses during this campaign. In a village of Ropar district, when a team of Morcha activists entered the village for their campaign, the villagers, mistaking them for the agents of some parliamentary party, gheraoed them. But when the Morcha activists told the people about their identity and their purpose, people's hostility at once turned into hospitality. "Paste the poster here, if it does not belong to any vote-party." "Is the leaflet not of any vote-party? Okay then, let me read it." "What you have written tells the truth." "They are 100 per cent correct". Such comments indicated the receptive mood of the masses to the policies of the revolutionary mass fronts.

— In one mass gathering, when a leader of the Morcha very effectively projected the message of the campaign, some persons came to the stage at the end of the conference. They said to Morcha leader, "Brother, all of your points are worth lakhs of rupees each, they are worth safeguarding by encasing them in a box. But tell us the door to which now we

should bow our heads." By saying so they were asking for a correct and pro-people political party which can provide an alternative to the ruling class parties.

— In a village of Bhatinda district, when a parliamentary candidate of the ruling party had just come to the stage in an election meeting in a landless labour locality, he was confronted by a big contingent of agricultural workers and peasants under the leadership of P.A.L.U. and B.K.U. (Ekta). They were insisting that the candidate must answer their questions. The candidate and his supporters, getting nervous, immediately left the place and rushed to the venue of another election meeting in the village. But no sooner did the motorcade of the candidate reach this second venue than the same group of agitated people, loaded with uncomfortable questions for the Akali leaders, appeared on the scene. Again the Akali candidate and his supporters had to leave the meeting without addressing it, and had to flee the village. This village (Chak Fateh Singh) belongs to a big landlord family who are the in-laws of the Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal. As the saying goes, "Out of the frying pan, into the fire". When the motorcade of the Akali candidate went to another village, about 15 kms from this village, to address an election meeting, he was gheraoed by peasants of that village who were agitating for jobs in a nearby thermal power plant for which their lands had been acquired at very cheap rates. The enraged Akali candidate got the B.K.U. leaders of Chak Fateh Singh village arrested. The son of the Akali leaders rubbed salt in the wounds of the peasants of Chak village, and hearing at night the news of their leaders' arrest, more than 100 people (men and women) immediately stormed the police post about four kms from the village and freed their leaders. After a few days an Akali minister hailing from this district besieged the village with hundreds of policemen; only then could he hold an election meeting in the village.

— At one place a flag march of L.M.P. and P.A.L.U. passed the site of an election rally of the Akali Dal (Tohra). Immediately the whole gathering of the Akali Dal deserted the rally, listened to the revolutionary speakers, and got convinced and impressed. At another place people did not disperse even after the announcement about the end to a Morcha rally.

— At some places people asked Morcha activists to fight the elections. Although it indicated faith in the Morcha, it betrayed the fact that the people's disillusion with the system is being expressed through resentment against ruling class parties, and has not yet acquired the character of conscious opposition to the system as a whole.

— At some places, the lack of confidence in the effectiveness and strength of the revolutionary alternative was reflected in comments like, "It is difficult to prevail on the basis of such pure truth". But wherever people passed through experience of organised struggle their response indicated a notable change. Their reaction overcame economic compulsions and traditional dependence on feudal landlords of the village. In one village a supporter of a ruling class party led by a landlord tried to snub a young boy of an agricultural labour family with the question, "If you do not vote, who will arrange wood for the cremation of your grandfather?" Immediately came the reply, "The same people who have forced the police to withdraw false cases registered against my father". P.A.L.U. of the area had fought a long struggle to get the cases against the boy's father, an important leader of the union, withdrawn.

— When a woman relative of the Badal family went to a landless labour locality of a village of Muktsar district to canvas for the son of Chief Minister Badal, she sat on the cot in the house of a landless labourer family to enact a stunt of nearness to landless labourers. The landless labour woman from the family, wearing dirty and smelly clothes, sat very confidently on the same cot beside the woman Akali leader. The policemen accompanying the leader shouted at the woman labourer for sitting next to the leader, and for touching such a dignitary from a landlord family, a relative of the Chief Minister at that. The woman labourer refused to move, and asked the canvassing team in an offensive tone, "If we people may not sit beside you, then how are we equal to you, as you claim, and how are you entitled to get our votes?" Similarly, in a village of Ludhiana district, when a woman Akali leader of the Tohra group, while canvassing for votes, tried to embrace a landless woman labourer, the woman labourer reacted sharply and pushed the woman leader aside, saying, "How are we equal to each other?" These incidents indicate that in the areas passing through the struggle movement under the leadership

of P.A.L.U., landless labourers gave a sharp response to the message of the election-exposure campaign, expressing class confidence, class hatred and political advancement.

The struggle actions organised by B.K.U. (Ekta) and P.A.L.U. during the peak days of the election campaign provided a good activity (parallel to the ruling class election campaign) for the masses to participate in. In some areas a number of people abstained from voting under the influence of the revolutionary political campaign. Some people turned to the parallel booth or rally organised by the revolutionary activists on the election day itself. Some suitable forms need to be explored for providing positive expression to people's disgust regarding parliamentary politics and their longing for the revolutionary alternative, even on election day itself.

The campaign has resulted in charging the revolutionary ranks with enthusiasm based on more theoretical clarity combined with concrete practical experience. The clarity through education inspired them to approach the masses confidently, and the response of the masses further enhanced their confidence.

Punjab Peasant Masses Give a Fitting Reply to Jethuke Firing

— by a correspondent

The strength of the Punjab peasants' response to police repression described in the following report is significant. It cannot be explained solely with reference to the immediate issue — an agitation against hiked bus fares. The fierceness of the battle between the villagers and the police, the way in which the peasants repeatedly overcame police attempts to prevent assembly, the large numbers at the rallies and at even points of sharp physical confrontation — all these indicate that the masses have found in this sharp struggle a rallying point, an expression of their pent-up rage against those who exploit and rule over them; and that they have found in the organisers of the struggle a militant, reliable and democratic leadership capable of truly representing their rage.

The underlying source of this rage lies in the intensifying economic crisis of the peasantry of Punjab. This crisis is the consequence of the path of agricultural 'development' into which the comprador-feudal state has thrust the peasantry over the past 35 years, and in particular to the new economic policy which has launched a multi-pronged attack on the peasants' livelihood. The phenomena of rampant suicides and alcoholism are negative outlets for the desperate peasants. When the poor peasants find a positive outlet, they rally to it in unexpected numbers and with explosive force. The Haryana peasant upsurge of 1998 against hiked electricity rates (see Comrade no. 7) and the Jethuke struggle are both evidence of this trend. Hence the current struggle is an auspicious sign of future developments.

— Editor, Comrade

After the brutal police firing of January 29 at Jethuke, in which two youth were killed, the struggle of the peasants of four villages in Rampura Phul area of Bhatinda district against the hike in private bus fares has been transformed into a broader, more significant, assertion of the peasantry's *right* to struggle. Despite stiff repression, the struggle is at its height at the time of this writing. Hence the following is merely a bulletin.

A village with a fighting tradition

Jethuke, Rampura Phul area, is the village of Jhanda Singh Jethuke, Bhatinda district unit president of Bharti Kisan Union (BKU) - Ekta. This village of just 2600 people has a vibrant tradition of struggle. In the days of the freedom movement Jethuke was a centre of agitation against the princely states as well as against surrendering crop share to the jagirdars; conferences were held here, and those fighting against the jagirdars took shelter in this village. It was from here that in 1939 resistance began to the Patiala maharaja's attempt to collect crop-share. When the Second World War began, Jethuke villagers resisted the conscription.

In the 1970s, during the height of the revolutionary student and youth movement in Punjab, there was an active unit of the youth organisation Naujawan Bharat Sabha in Jethuke. In 1979, the outstanding leader of the Punjab Students' Union, Pirthipal Singh Randhawa, was murdered by an Akali-supported gang, and the Akali-Janata regime carried out a reign of terror over several months throughout the state against the revolutionary mass movement. Jethuke village became one of the targets, witnessing relentless police raids, beating of parents of the Sabha activists, rounding up of all the villagers and threats of violence and destruction of their homes and crops if they did not turn over the Sabha activists, and custodial torture of the leading Sabha activists of the village — in particular Jhanda Singh Jethuke and Buta Singh. Thus the village has a proud history of collective fight, and a leadership that has earned the trust of the villagers over years of struggle and sacrifice.

Bus fare agitation

Now, since December 1999, the people of this pocket were agitating against the effective hike in fares of private bus operators and their illegal actions. The fares of private bus operators are meant to be set on the basis of a Government survey and a distance-based formula. However,

the Punjab government has recently changed the system of calculation. Earlier, if for a given distance the formula yielded a fare of x rupees and fifty paise, or over fifty paise, the amount used to be rounded up to the next rupee; if not, it would be rounded down. Under the new system the fare would be rounded upward if the formula yielded even one paisa over the rupee (eg., Rs 4.01 would be rounded off to Rs 5). Secondly, since the transport survey was not made public, private transporters bribed officials to get their routes shown to be of longer distances than in fact they were, enabling them to charge higher fares. Thirdly, minibus operators were illegally operating beyond their route limits of 50 km.

Four villages joined in the BKU (Ekta) agitation against the higher fares; Jethuke village became the headquarters. In the first round, people gheraoed the private buses. The police arrived, ready to beat up the people. The DSP announced that the present fares would remain, come what may. The BKU leadership realised the police's intention to attack, and also that the people were as yet unprepared. They therefore said that they would discuss with the people; the tehsildar meanwhile said that they would find a solution; and thus the immediate situation was defused.

Then the Rampura Phul region BKU (Ekta) leaders began preparing and mobilising people over several days for struggle. Again the gheraos of private buses began. The authorities came round for negotiation. A compromise was arrived at in the presence of the DSP and the SDM. The compromise was that bus operators would show the people the basic survey and the corresponding rates. Till they did so, the operators would have to deposit Rs 1,000 per day every day with the SDM. Afterwards they could get it back if they could substantiate their claim; but if the distances were not as claimed by them, then the money would be refunded to the people.

The bus operators did not implement this agreement for even a single day. So the BKU delegation again met the subdivisional authorities and asked for it to be implemented. They told the SDM that they would boycott the buses and would carry passengers on tractor-trolleys free of charge. The SDM informally agreed to the use of trolleys for passengers. The District Transport Officer (DTO) also agreed that the bus operators' case was not justified, and that he would make sure they behaved.

The bus operators used their political clout to get the DTO transferred. The new DTO was entirely in their favour. When the BKU del-

egation met the Deputy Commissioner of Bhatinda, the DC rebuked and threatened them, saying that "You are running a parallel government". This attitude on the one hand expressed the administration's determination in general to suppress the growing assertion of organised peasant power. But it also could be traced to three recent incidents in which the SDM, Phul, was directly involved.

Background to the authorities' hostility

The first incident, in which peasants of this region resorted to direct action to get electricity transformers replaced, has already been reported in *Comrade* nos 11-12. The second incident was when the authorities, who were deliberately not acquiring the peasants' paddy, were forced by mass agitation to acquire it at the official rates. Here too the SDM was directly involved in the negotiation.

The third incident was the gherao of a land mortgage bank in Rampura Phul. The background was that peasants in Punjab were being arrested because they were unable, owing to crop failure, to pay back their loans from cooperative banks. In some cases such arrests and humiliations had even resulted in suicides. This was one aspect of the most burning problem of the landed peasantry at present, namely the debt-trap. Shortly after a round of statewide joint demonstrations of five peasant organisations against the World Trade Organisation (before the Seattle meet of the WTO), the BKU (Ekta) Bhatinda committee took up a campaign against the land mortgage bank, demanding a halt to the arrests. In Rampura block, for two days 65 peasant activists, and for another day, 25 peasant activists, went from village to village in tractor trolleys, mobilising peasants for a gherao of the bank. The peasants were undeterred by the prior attempts of the police, including the DSP, to threaten them against joining the gherao.

On December 20 about 1,000 peasants began the gherao at 1.30 p.m., and the bank manager and other officers were prevented from leaving the premises, even as all other persons were prevented from entering. Peasants mounted the roof of the bank to keep a watch on all approaches. BKU leaders meanwhile argued with the bank officials. Meanwhile word went to the villages, and fresh reinforcements of peasants came, along with donations of milk and other necessities. Instead of lifting the gherao at 5 p.m., as the officials anticipated, around 900 peasants remained there

for the night despite the cold and made clear that their gherao would continue until their demands were met. The authorities were forced to buckle. On the afternoon of December 21, the D.C. (Bhatinda) and the bank authorities arrived at an agreement with the BKU (Ekta), which was announced by the S.D.M. (Phul). The main clauses were that for the next six months no peasant would be arrested or harassed on account of inability to repay bank loans, and all peasants would be issued loan pass-books so that they could keep track of their payments. The land mortgage bank struggle gave a boost to the BKU (Ekta), and was a humiliation for the authorities. Apart from these three struggles there were many other small and big struggles taken up in villages of the region by the BKU, especially during the recent period.

Therefore, when now in January the BKU (Ekta) deputation met the authorities, including the same SDM, to resolve the bus fares issue, the SDM took a tough stand, flatly asserted that the fares would not be revised, and warned them against agitation.

Next round of struggle

The deputation then went back to the villages. A gathering of more than 200 people was arranged for discussion and consultation. The BKU (Ekta) leaders considered that it would be better not to precipitate too sharp a struggle on the issue of bus fares, but rather on the much more fundamental issue of indebtedness. They suggested that on the issue of bus fares legal means and negotiations should be sought for the moment. After discussion the leaders asked for people to express their opinion by raising their hands. About 80-100 people said that there should be no recourse to negotiation or legal action; but the majority, over 100 people, preferred the legal course. Still, the question remained: should the boycott and the use of tractor trolleys continue, despite the fact that the SDM had said this would be illegal? On this there was unanimity: "If the authorities prevented the use of trolleys we should confront them".

When the trolley service started, the police arrested the trolley, including the passengers (women and children too), and took them to the police station. People refused to get down from the trolley and began to shout slogans. The next trolley-load too offered arrest by coming to the gate of the police station; the police shut the gate to

prevent its entry. The villagers got news of the arrest, and soon four to five hundred people reached the police station, prepared for a clash. However, the union leaders avoided a clash there, as it would have been favourable to the police. The people decided that "since the police had arrested our people, we'll arrest the transporters' buses". That night they demonstrated in the town, and then went from village to village till one a.m. The next day they began "arresting" buses, shut them up in the gurdwara, and assembled in large numbers, eagerly awaiting the police. But the police didn't come, and instead sent back the captured trolley. At first the people wanted anyway to keep the buses locked up at least overnight, but then they decided to release them. The trolley service was kept operating from the next day.

In the next stage, mobilisation was stepped up. It was decided to occupy the railway track at Jethuke (where there is a railway station). Four to five hundred people took part, including a large number of women. (Throughout, the participation of women in the agitation has been high.) The district officials reached the village and offered to negotiate from the next day. The people agreed to this, and so after three to four hours the blockade of the track was lifted.

The next day, at Bhatinda, negotiations started under an additional DC. Again the BKU district leaders insisted that they should be shown the basic survey and that the fare should be calculated according to the survey. The authorities and the transporters said it couldn't be done so quickly. When the BKU leaders pointed out that the information could be faxed, the transporters admitted privately that in fact there were lacunae with regard to all the other routes, too, so that showing the BKU leaders the survey would set off a much bigger problem for them. The negotiations broke down on this point, which involved the people's right to information.

Once the negotiations broke down, the BKU district leaders phoned the village from Bhatinda, and told the people to re-start the rail blockade. As the negotiating team was returning to the village, the police arrested all four of them. Hearing this news, the number of people blocking the track swelled from 400 to 1,000. One train was halted at Rampura, one at the next station. The villagers served tea and food to the passengers on the train halted near Jethuke. Other villagers gathered around there.

Battle at Jethuke

The police arrived in huge numbers under the SP, Bhatinda. The police brought the other train too to Jethuke, and they came with a video camera filming the scene — in order to prepare a case for the future. In a pre-planned provocation, the SP and his police escort went to the stage the people had set up, snatched the microphone, and broke the wire. The angry people answered this with stone-throwing. In the serious clash that followed, the people repulsed the attack of the lathi- and gun-wielding police. The police ran. Groups of people picked up the discarded police shields and danced in joy on the tracks.

The BKU leadership at the spot decided to temporarily withdraw, knowing that the police would come back in larger numbers to retaliate. They made plans that particular leaders should also withdraw, in order that they could lead later in case of further trouble or firing.

However, a group of militant people refused to withdraw nevertheless. When the police again attacked after regrouping, this group of people remained and continued to clash with the police. After the first attack was repulsed the granthi of the village announced from the gurdwara loudspeaker that they should not be afraid but continue to fight. One of the leaders who had been asked to withdraw temporarily went to the gurdwara and announced from the loudspeaker about the people's victory in facing the police. He said: "We should continue to resist, because if the police get the upper hand now we'll lose heavily." So now the field of confrontation shifted from the tracks to the vilage itself, where the people were under attack by the police. The police were beating, firing, and terrorising. The BKU leader announced from the loudspeaker that people should regroup on the streets and defeat the police: "The police have been defeated in the first round, we have the upper hand. Now the police are raiding our streets and houses. Fight bravely to repulse them again. Heap stones on your roofs. Organise fighting squads to clear the streets of the police gangsters!" The call got an immediate response.

Thus took place a fierce and remarkable battle in the lanes of Jethuke village. The BKU leader who had made the announcement himself regrouped people to physically drive the police out of the village lanes. Contingents of people were formed ranging from 10 to 50 persons. Slogans were shouted by the people against the police as they battled the bewildered policemen. Amazingly, the police were forced to retreat and

carry out firing from behind shelter, as if they were not facing stones but bullets. This confrontation went on till 1.45 a.m., at which point the streets were successfully cleared of the police. Although two people were shot dead by the police in the village streets (not at the track site), no less than 20 of the 27 injured were policemen. (The two youth, Gurmeet Singh and Despal Singh, who were killed were in fact uninvolved in the fighting: both were landless labourer dalits who were returning home from work in the fields, and were picked up and shot dead at their homes by the police perhaps simply because the dalit basti was closest to the railway tracks.) So great was the people's anger that one of the BKU leaders had to save the life of an ASI who was being thrashed too severely. Another policeman was later heard telling a pharmacist that he had caught fever after having spent the entire night awake and shivering covered by a mere shawl, wondering from which side he was going to be attacked by the villagers emerging out of the darkness. So high was the fighting spirit of the people that when an old woman saw some persons fleeing from the tracks under attack by the police, she stopped them and got them to go back to the scene of the confrontation. A peasant participant in the clash told his fellow villagers, "I have often seen the police beating the people, but this is the first time I have seen the people beating the police". All these indicate the morale of the respective sides, despite the fact that the police were armed with about 200 guns, teargas shells, etc, (according to the official record, the police fired 1500 cartridges) and the people, numbering about 1,000, had only stones as weapons.

In the bloody clash between the people (including men and women, peasants and landless labour) and the police at Jethuke, the people actually came out the winners and the rulers were defeated. In a physical clash, the criterion of victory or defeat is not only the loss of life suffered by each side. Rather the main criterion is whose morale remained high and who was demoralised before, during and after the clash. Note that the number of people in the rail blockade *doubled* after they knew that the leadership had been arrested, and that a police attack was now inevitable. When the clash began, the response from the people of Jethuke and another village (four-five kms away) was instant, with people eagerly throwing themselves into the fight.

Repression

After the firing, the vengeful police arrested the father of Despal Singh, one of the two young men that they had shot dead in cold blood. They beat the arrested father in the village itself, then took him to the police station and beat him very badly. As yet the father, who had just returned from work when he was arrested, did not know of the killing of his son. Then the police presented him his son's dead body and made him identify it. After this they threw him back in the village. The next morning they rearrested him, took him to the police station, and forced him to put his thumbprint on many blank papers.

From February 1 itself began the next phase of the struggle, in which the immediate issue of struggle was the right of the people to speech and assembly as part of their fundamental right to organise and struggle. The police blocked all routes to the village and seized the village. The DC came to the village itself, and ordered that only five persons should be allowed to the cremation ground where the police took the two dead bodies. A strict police blockade was set up all around.

However, a group of 40-50 BKU members from a section of Sangrur district, having read the news in the papers, had rushed to the village. When the police stopped the vehicle, they didn't disclose that they were BKU activists, but claimed that their relative "Pappu" had died and they had come for the mourning. Somehow they managed to smuggle themselves into the village, and split up into groups of three and four, going around among the people. A CPI MP, Bhan Singh Bhaura, had also reached the site, and had found live police cartridges in the house of one of the firing victims, proof that the firing had not taken place at the blockade site.

The people were furious at not being allowed to proceed to the cremation ghaat. Bhaura said he would go with them, whereupon four to five hundred gathered to go. At the site the DC began to abuse the people, not recognising the MP; when the SSP introduced the MP, the DC changed his tone and allowed the people to go through. At the cremation site, a Sangrur BKU leader addressed the gathering boldly, exposing the authorities and their partisanship with the transporters, and their repression.

Along with the repression began the intervention of political parties. The next day an Akali minister hailing from Bhatinda district reached the

village, and announced a sum of Rs 50,000 each to the two victims' families. He tried to provoke the people against the BKU leadership, claiming that "outsiders" were responsible for the situation, and that people should form a village committee to resolve the issue. However, the villagers were not fooled. Some women were sitting in the hut of one of the victims. The youth's mother was recounting the incident. The Akali sarpanch of the village kept stopping her from talking, and said "listen to the leader". When BKU women continued talking, he challenged them, "Stand up and talk". So a woman promptly stood up and boldly put forward the case of the union.

The authorities miserably failed to drive fear into the hearts of the people and to isolate the BKU leadership. The aggressive stance of the authorities related not only to the bus fare issue. Behind their assault was their worry that (i) the message of the BKU that *people's force* is needed to go ahead might spread; and (ii) the embryonic form of people's power which was emerging might leave an impact for times to come. Hence the authorities were determined to crush the agitation. (Senior police officials told the newspaper *Dainik Jagran* that "in some previous struggles of BKU, the fact that their demands were too quickly accepted has emboldened them.... after their gherao of the agricultural development bank officials, and the acceptance of their demands, the BKU began feeling that all their demands can be got by use of force.")

For the opposition parties, the issue was one to exploit for their electoral gain. A by-election was to take place on February 17. The Akali image has been declining; were the Akalis to lose the elections, the decline would be fast from within the party too. Hence both the ruling party and the opposition attached great importance to the by-elections. The state Congress president, Amrinder Singh, rushed to the village and announced formation of an enquiry team. His wife, Maharani Parneet Kaur, MP, rushed to the village and announced Rs 20,000 each to the families of the dead. Congress leader Jagmeet Singh Brar (who had defeated Badal's son) rushed to the village and said he would raise the issue in Parliament. Simranjit Singh Mann also rushed to the village. And apart from Bhaura, the district secretaries of CPI and CPI(M) made their tours of the village.

Countering the rulers' tactics of isolation

In the period after the firing, when the issue occupied the front pages

of the newspapers and was the subject of widespread discussion, the authorities took a two-pronged approach. In a sense the police were on the defensive. They adopted a policy of not using force against the common people in the form of torture, arrests, etc. Instead they tried to create and maintain an atmosphere of fear and threats. On the other hand, their attitude towards BKU (Ekta) was different: it was to disallow them from functioning openly. The objective was to create a leadership vacuum for the people, so that the people's resentment and anger against the bus owners and the authorities may not materialise in the form of mass propaganda, mobilisation and struggle. The authorities thus deployed a large number of police contingents (stationary as well as mobile) in the area, particularly in Jethuke. The top district leadership of BKU had already been arrested. New fake cases were foisted on them in February for offences supposedly committed in December and January (during the bank gherao and the bus agitation). Now there were warrants on almost all the leaders, and their houses were continuously raided, in some cases many times a day. Jethuke was sealed off from all sides.

Despite this the people did not get terrorised, rather they were indignant and agitated. The immediate task for the leadership was to fill the leadership vacuum, by setting up a system of underground and secret or semi-secret functioning. The approach for deployment of leadership resources, in various villages involved in this struggle, was to influence the periphery by effectively tackling the core — and, in turn, to reinforce the core by mobilising encouraging elements in the periphery. The organisational approach was to guide and strengthen each lower layer of leadership by guiding and strengthening the higher layer of leadership.

The most pressing and immediate need was to penetrate the core village, Jethuke, and to come in touch with and communicate with the people to materialise their anger into a struggle. The task was difficult. Since all the BKU leaders of the village and of the area were being hunted, there was no reliable secret network, nor a trained and capable BKU leader available for this specific task of mobilising Jethuke. This dire need was fulfilled by some leaders of Lok Morcha Punjab and Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union. They plunged into the village like paratroopers, hoodwinking the hundreds of watchful police eyes. They started secret mass work determinedly in spite of the fact that they did not have sufficient and reliable footholds in the village. The next problem was that people did not know

these activists adequately. This problem was solved by arranging a meeting of an advanced group of village people with the main leaders of the struggle who were under arrest. The latter certified the credentials of the Lok Morcha and Khet Mazdoor Union activists to this group of people.

Then, after a round of individual and small group secret meetings, the question arose as to what should be the lowest form of open mass mobilisation. It was suggested that the advanced layer of the people should form a group and lead a signature campaign for their demands and against the police atrocities. However, people were not prepared at first to lead this open campaign against the police. Though everybody was ready to participate in any mass campaign of mass struggle under the leadership of any trusted leader, people would not agree to perform any role single-handedly, or as part of a small group which would make him the select target of police ire.

So it was decided, instead, to start a propaganda and mobilisation campaign under the cover of a house-to-house campaign for collecting aid (money and rations etc) for the poor families of the two martyrs. People readily accepted this form as they knew the police could not dare to suppress this charitable social activity in an atmosphere charged with sympathy for the dependents of the two martyrs. Within no time a large group of people (45 men and women) were going house to house to collect aid as well as conducting a (secret) propaganda campaign and preparing the people for the next course of action, ie, the bhog ceremony (the religious ceremony for the last rites of the deceased on the tenth day after death). People wished to use the bhog ceremony as a public political platform against the rulers. The police for their part were trying their best to limit this function to an indoor family affair of the families of the martyrs.

As the aid-collecting campaign picked up, the people gathered courage and began to contend openly with the police by daily announcing from the village loudspeakers that the bhog would be performed in the village common place, where the whole of the village should assemble.

The authorities and the private transporters also began their own propaganda campaign, with the help of some political leaders, so-called peasant leaders and a section of the press. The lies spread were as follows: (i) The union leaders had arbitrarily abandoned the negotiations and peaceful resolution of the dispute; (ii) the BKU took the law into its own hands;

(iii) the police were forced to fire on the demonstrators because the latter began burning one of the trains; (iv) the demonstrators fired from their own (unlicensed) rifles on the police, and the two victims were in fact killed by bullets from the demonstrators' guns, not the police's. All these were complete fabrications. In order to bolster their case, the police produced an unlicensed rifle which they claimed to have seized from one of the peasants' houses; in fact this too was concocted. Finally, the police and press propagated: "For the sake of just one rupee (ie the difference in the fares), the BKU brought about the deaths of two poor youth".

On the day of the bhog ceremony, the police made heavy deployments to prevent the gathering of people. It was a cold and rainy day. Nakabandi was enforced on the roads leading to the village from Bhatinda and from Barnala and Mansa. Not one but several checkpoints were set up on the same route. Just beyond the town limits of Rampura Phul was a police checkpoint, and another was set up a few kilometres down the road. Further, the DSP of Mansa district, Balwinder Singh Romana, was himself manning the last checkpoint, despite the cold weather and rain. Newspapers reported that even vans of wedding parties were thoroughly searched. They also reported that police were not only manning the roads but even the canals and fields on the way to Jethuke. Two vehicles of the fire brigade were placed at Gill Kalan Highway police chowky. In Jethuke itself, the police occupied the place where the public function was to be held. The police themselves issued a press release in the name of the victims' families to the effect that the ceremony would be in their own homes and there would be no public function (the families themselves had refused to give such a statement to the police). In order to terrorise the people arriving for the function, the police tried a new tactic: they deployed some 70 fierce-looking dogs!

One Hindi newspaper reported the scene at Jethuke village itself: "From the morning there was silence in the town. But as soon as the gurdwara announced that now the bhog of both martyrs would be performed, people streamed out of their houses. Women did not remain behind and they powerfully raised slogans against the police and authorities. Raising slogans against the excesses of the police and the government, they said that people's voice could not be silenced by bullets. They said that their movement would go on till they got justice. In one voice they raised the slogan: 'Shaheedan tuhadi soch te, pehra dyaange thok ke', 'gal pai jaan je

bhakke log, bamb bandookan sake na rok, 'sarkaaran te na jhaak karo, apni rakhi aap karo' (martyrs, we will defend your thought; bombs and guns cannot stop a determined people; don't look to the government, prepare your own self-defence). Speakers demanded a judicial inquiry into the firing during the peaceful movement, the registering of a murder case against the guilty, the release of the arrested peasant leaders, payment of Rs five lakh to each of the victims' families, Rs 50,000 each to each of the injured, and a peaceful resolution, through dialogue, to the dispute on bus fares."

Large numbers of people were no doubt stopped at various places along the way by the police forces. But, amazingly, thousands of people overcame all obstacles (breaking police cordons at places) and reached Jethuke. Neither fear of the police nor the heavy rains could prevent contingent after contingent of 50-100 each from somehow making its way to the site. The total swelled to about 5,000.

The atmosphere became charged with excitement as a leaflet was distributed. This leaflet was a reproduction of a letter from the four jailed BKU leaders of Bhatinda. The headline read: "Keep faith with the blood shed by the martyrs of Jethuke.... Grind the Government's conspiracies into the dust". Point by point the letter refuted all the Government propaganda, showing how it was the transporters and the administration, not the BKU, that had backed out of the agreements arrived at earlier. It also showed how the difference of "just one rupee" on each ticket amounted to a large sum for both the people and the transporters, even more so if taken for all 12,000 villages in the state. Finally, it showed that the real issue was not just the bus fare, but the attempt by the authorities to crush the rising organised force of the peasantry in the district, which was posing a challenge to various exploiters and the misdeeds of the authorities. The jailed leaders called upon the people to be prepared for the fight.

Rampura rally

After the bhog ceremony rally began the next phase of struggle. The issue was the success or failure of the protest rally-cum-march to be held in Rampura Mandi (10 km from Jethuke). The following approach was adopted during the mobilisation campaign to defeat the efforts of the police and authorities.

— Form the biggest possible groups of men and women in each vil-

lage to lead the mobilisation campaign. (In two villages, groups of only women would mobilise, as it was difficult for the police to arrest or beat women.)

— In each village, continuously analyse the problems affecting the mass participation in the campaign, and solve them immediately.

— Expose the reality of the police behaviour — that though the police seem very terrifying in their posture in fact they are on the defensive. Encourage the people to use this weakness of the police forces and to push them more and more on the defensive.

— In each village, project every advance of the movement in other villages of the area in other areas of BKU-Ekta influence, and among supporting sections of the people.

— Project the determined will to fight, and the victorious mood, of the jailed BKU leaders (eg through the letter-leaflet).

— Propagate points of long-term importance, such as "We cannot afford not to fight for the right to organise and struggle"; "People's relation with the State is one of enmity, so the beating of the police by the people should not be seen as 'excesses'". Project the path of hostile confrontation with the State's armed forces.

— Link this struggle with the imminent peasant struggle against the debt-trap in the area.

Apart from Bhatinda district, demonstrations regarding the firing were carried out in these days at many places in the state — eg, Ludhiana, Nakodar, Banga, Kadian, Mansa, Saunke, Singhewala, Ramdas, etc. At many places the Punjab Agricultural Labour Union took the initiative to hold the protest. In Bhatinda jail too a meeting was held to condemn the firing; about 80 prisoners were addressed by the arrested BKU leaders.

Divergent understandings

A few days after the firing, state leaders of BKU (Ekta) announced that an action committee would be formed to lead the struggle. Two trends were seen in the BKU (Ekta). The wrong trend, dominant in the state committee, decided to form an action committee not only to support the struggle but to *lead* it. It included not only revolutionary mass organisations but also CPI, CPI(M), the Tohra Akali Dal, CPI(ML) Liberation, Saraf group (IDP), etc.

The position of the correct trend was that an action committee should

be formed but only to *help* the struggle and not to *lead* it. Only the BKU (Ekta) can and should lead the struggle. Only pro-people and revolutionary mass organisations should be included in the action committee. Revisionist and other ruling class parties should not be included. As the call of the February 29th rally was given by the action committee, the stage of the rally was sure to be misused by the revisionist and other ruling class leaders. So the leaders of the correct trend in the BKU (Ekta), as well as in the revolutionary democratic movement, made sure that (i) a proper political perspective would be projected by various means during the rally and (ii) the militant mood of the people, particularly of the peasantry, should get full play in the rally.

Thus thousands of copies of a leaflet of the BKU (Ekta) district committee, and 2,000 of a handbill of Lok Morcha, Punjab, containing a list of 34 slogans, were distributed in the rally. Both of these leaflets projected a proper political perspective of the struggle. A special issue of *Mukti Marg*, the monthly organ of Lok Morcha, Punjab, was sold at the rally.

On February 29, the day of the rally, the police again made very elaborate arrangements, with a network of checkpoints and barriers, to disperse the masses coming to the rally. The supporters of the correct trend, while on their way to the rally from various directions, organised themselves into 12 big detachments (comprising 200-500 men and women each). Each detachment was led by determined and selected revolutionary mass leaders. So these 4,000 well-organised, militant masses defiantly overran two, three, even four police barriers in the way of each detachment and managed to reach the venue of the rally. The peasant detachment from Jethuke and nearby villages was led by peasant leaders against whom there were arrest warrants but who directly faced, challenged, and crossed the threatening police parties at about four places. Three such leaders of BKU (Ekta) and a woman leader of a women's organisation (against whom too there was a warrant) dared the hundreds of policemen to arrest them. It was exhilarating to see the streets of Rampura reverberating with the militancy and revolutionary slogans of more than 6,000 marchers.

February 29, 2000.

Elections to the 13th Parliament **Experiences of the Election-Period Campaign in Malkangiri**

— by a correspondent

During the earlier elections, the Malkangiri Zilla Adibasi Sangh (MZAS), the mass organisation of the tribal people in Malkangiri, had been taking up wide political campaigns in the main area of its work. This time too, the executive committee of the Sangh planned to undertake an intensive propaganda-agitation campaign in a suitable manner.

The EC of the MZAS, in its conscious bid to further the ongoing consolidation of the mass organisation, planned to concentrate its election propaganda in the selected belts of the mass organisation rather than carry out an extensive campaign throughout the whole area of the mass organisation's influence and work. The mass organisation's activists, well-equipped with the mass organisation's understanding and orientation, and with experience of its mass revolutionary practice, were constituted into effective propaganda teams. These teams were to be sent to different pockets to organise mass meetings, rallies and other suitable gatherings of the tribal people. While highlighting their issues and problems and the futility of parliamentary institutions in relation to these issues, they were to project the gains made through their organisation and struggles and the way to their immediate as well as ultimate salvation. A leaflet issued by the Sangh was to be widely distributed by these teams. The teams aimed also to motivate and mobilise the masses to get involved in the team's propagation work.

Although the mass organisation's leaflet was prepared by the main leadership of the MZAS, it was first thoroughly discussed in the steering committee and the draft was later improved after taking into account

their suggestions. An extended meeting of the mass activists themselves was organised in which the election issue was thoroughly discussed. Then the propaganda teams were formed. Thus, in all 12 teams, comprising two to seven activists, left for various pockets to propagate the politics of the Sangh. Most of the teams concentrated in the central zone and the Hamco zone. Two teams campaigned in the Chittrakonda-Tapu area while one team went to Tendki-Challanguda area for the campaigning. Leaflets were sent to the areas of work and influence of the mass organisation in Koraput and Nabrangpur districts as well.

On strict government instructions, all the printing presses in the tribal area refused to print the Sangh's leaflet, and new arrangements had to be made all of a sudden to get the leaflet printed from a far-off place. This delayed the Sangh campaign, leaving the Sangh teams with only eight to 10 days for actual campaigning. Incessant rains, paucity of financial resources, fever epidemic in the tribal areas, and lack of transport across the rivers and streams (the ferries and boats had been captured by the administration to transport poll staff and materials) were other odds that faced the Sangh teams. All the teams travelled on foot even to the remotest areas, some through high mountainous routes in torrential rains. The enemy forces floated many rumours, such as "the Sangh propagandists will be arrested by the police", "Sangh activists have been attacked, killed, and their bodies disposed of", etc, to scare away the tribal masses from Sangh meetings and gatherings. The police also organised its show of force in certain areas, mainly in Katapali-Moupadar panchayats of Hamco area where the people demonstrated during the pre-election period in front of the Moupadar police outpost, to oppose the A.S.I.'s practice of taking bribes. The daughter of a Sangh activist was dumbfounded on seeing her father alive, as he had been rumoured to have been killed and buried. She did not allow him to venture out of his house for three to four days.

Notwithstanding all the naive attempts of the enemy forces, the Sangh campaign was highly effective and successful. The Sangh meetings were well attended, at places in the hundreds. The tribal people listened to the Sangh activists with rapt attention, participated in discussions, raised questions pertaining to their problems, asked that Sangh activists should visit frequently and organise Sangh bodies in their areas. The most hotly raised and discussed issues related to land and forest. In these meetings, gains achieved through organised struggles under the banner of the Sangh

were projected and contrasted with the false promises made by the vote-leaders. The tribals expressed their disenchantment with the vote-parties en masse, and vowed on their own not to participate in the elections. Demands came up everywhere for the setting up of Sangh bodies, taking up of struggles, etc. The Sangh teams reciprocated the tribals' sentiments, and made promises to visit again. Many teams again visited the tribal villages to fulfil their promises. Even new Sangh bodies were set up in some villages. In two panchayats, Katapali and Moupadar, as mentioned earlier, the Sangh team even took up and organised a struggle issue against illegal extractions by the police; some 500 tribals gheraoed the police post to get back fine monies from the police.

Some Sangh leaders exhibited creativeness in their propaganda skills. In the same Moupadar panchayat, where a theft issue was agitating the local people, the Sangh team, sensing their mood, opted for a "Vichar" (a gathering to resolve some issue), and skilfully conveyed their message through the Vichar Sabha. The issue under discussion was the theft of a hen by a tribal. When the Sangh leaders argued that the tribal was not a habitual thief and fined him only Rs 100 (the amount going to the victim of the theft) and got an apology from him, the people retorted that the police wouldn't let him go without fining a minimum of Rs 500. With the help of this incident the Sangh leaders explained the distinction between contradictions among the people and the contradiction between the enemy and the people — the exploitation and oppression of the tribals at the hands of the police, authorities and exploiting classes. Highly impressed and convinced, the tribal people narrated at least 17 examples of police exactions; and then and there they formed a committee to get back the money from the police, and mobilised 500 people for the struggle against the police.

At one place, an all-women Sangh team posed as Congressmen who wanted to buy the people's votes. The tribals demanded land (instead of cash), identified themselves as followers of the Sangh, and ordered them to get out. Only when somebody disclosed the identity of the team as Sangh people did the people warmly receive them. Utilising the occasion, the Sangh team projected the central importance of land and the way to get land — as a way to start resolving various other problems of the people. In another village where forest committees were grabbing people's lands, the Sangh team offered Rs 2,000 per acre for land and de-

manded offers for the sale of land. One person agreed to sell his land. The people in the gathering argued with this person, asking how could he think of selling his land. In the course of the discussion, the Sangh team revealed its identity and laid bare the government tricks to create disunity among the tribal people and grab their lands. The all-women team also effectively used revolutionary songs to convey their message.

In some villages, the tribals argued with the BJP leaders, questioned them and declared that they would instead vote for their own *tangias* (their axes), or the handle of the plough, or land, etc. When a Sangh team visited an isolated mountainous village which they had never visited in the past, the people warmly received them and narrated how they knew all about the Sangh and its struggles and how they have been searching for the Sangh people for so long. In this mountain village all the roofs were made of jungle grass. When the Sangh team came to the village it was raining heavily. All the houses were completely drenched due to the poor roofing. So the team members stood in the street under their umbrellas and talked to the people inside their houses. Slowly they also came out onto the street with their broken umbrellas. Some of the people also dared the rains. One tribal told the team: "Do you know why my *lengota* (loincloth) is so dirty? Because I do not have a second one, and I am waiting for the rain to stop. Then I shall go to a spring to clean this, dry it, and wear it again. And look at our roofs. This is how we are living. What is the meaning of elections for us?"

Many new Sangh teams were organised in this way in the process of campaigning, to convey the Sangh message far and wide.

The Sangh teams effectively utilised the experience and gains of earlier Sangh struggles to convey the rudimentary idea of the real political alternative, the need of organisation and struggle, and the importance of the land and forest issues. They were quite successful in involving the people in lively discussions and combining their politics with the local issues. In one such meeting the people demanded an explanation from a Sangh leader for his having advised them to vote for the Janata Dal in an earlier election. The Sangh leader unhesitatingly admitted his mistake and explained that his level of consciousness at that time was not that high and he was in the wrong at that time, according to his present level of consciousness.

Although the Sangh teams nowhere impressed upon the people that

they should to boycott the polls, and at places when asked by the people to explicitly state their position conveyed with clarity their stand that they are for organisation and struggle, and that it is upto the people to decide whether to participate or not to participate, the tribal people opted en masse for abstaining from participation. Thus, in many Sangh villages either not a single tribal vote was cast or the voting was abysmally low. In one area (Tandki-Challanguda) where persistent struggles have been going on for the last three to four years, the Sangh has emerged as a parallel institution. A clear polarisation has taken place between the pro and anti-Sangh forces. In this area, a spontaneous poll boycott wave, the pro-Sangh forces swept the tribal villages in a show of unity and strength during the ongoing tussle with the enemy forces. The people in the area are on the verge of unleashing a big struggle against the neo-forest policies.

To sum up: despite the short time available for the campaigning, the Sangh teams felt highly confident and well-placed. The response of the tribal people to the Sangh propaganda was overwhelming. It further enhanced the confidence of the Sangh activists and consequently many Sangh activists have self-criticised themselves for not giving enough time to the Sangh affairs and promised to give more time and energy in future. Tangible gains were made in terms of creating new Sangh units, enlisting new Sangh activists, consolidating the existing units, raising the level of consciousness (political as well as organisational) of the tribal people and doing effective exposure of the parliamentary institutions. The Sangh as a body, felt more informed and equipped on the aspirations, problems and urges of the tribal people. In the prevailing circumstances, the Sangh campaign proved to be quite satisfactory.

The campaign experience

The campaign of the Sangh on the question of elections has provided the Sangh with rich experience. A few points are worth noting.

- (i) Discussion meetings are much more effective in disseminating the Sangh message than rallies or other forms of one-way communication. They help much more in understanding the people and their problems and in communicating the Sangh's politics.

(ii) As noted by the Sangh activists, struggles and campaigns over local issues can be of much help in consolidating the Sangh, in building local level leaderships in comparison to struggles on larger issues to start with.

(iii) The campaign has stressed the need to have a regular interaction with the Sangh units. (In certain pockets, because of scant interaction by the Sangh leadership in the face of their excessive engagement with struggles elsewhere, the local Sangh leaders turned into collaborators of the regime and misused their prestige and the name of the Sangh. The tribal people lodged numerous complaints with the visiting teams.) It calls for the reorganisation of the Sangh to ensure uninterrupted rapport with of the people with the Sangh in a suitable form.

(iv) The tribal people have exhibited everywhere their strong urge for organisation and struggle. The enemies have stepped up their offensive. An effective mechanism for struggle and self-defence is the need of the hour.

(v) The campaign has revealed how many grievances are preoccupying the tribal people's minds. At the time of such political campaigns, they won't lend the campaigners an ear unless they pay attention to their most pressing needs. Hence the activists need to master the method of combining their propaganda with discussing the people's grievances. Stereotyped methods of propaganda must be replaced by creative forms of communication.

Malkangiri Adivasis' Struggle for Their Rights over Bamboo

— by a correspondent

Under the leadership of the Malkangiri Zilla Adibasi Sangh (MZAS), the adivasis and other banbasis of Malkangiri have unleashed a powerful struggle in defence of their traditional rights over the bamboo growing in their region. Trampling on these rights, the Orissa government (at the ministerial level) regularly leases out this bamboo to paper mills owned by large comprador houses — such as the Thapars, Birlas, and Singhanias.

The compradors and the authorities depict the plunder of bamboo resources as an inevitable price of 'development'; but it is actually only the price of comprador-feudal maldevelopment. There is no inherent contradiction between paper production and the rights of the adivasis. It is possible to use bamboo as a raw material for paper without infringing the adivasis' rights over bamboo, and without depleting this precious resource. There are certain rules to be observed in cutting bamboo, such as not cutting the whole bush, only cutting the top part of the bamboo and leaving the root intact, cleaning growths around the bushes, etc. Moreover, ample bamboo plantation is meant to be carried out to replace the cut crop. If all these rules were to be strictly observed, the supply of bamboo would never get exhausted. (Under worker-peasant rule, such scientifically organised agriculture-based production can offer industrial employment in the rural areas itself to the peasant masses.)

However, to get a given amount of bamboo, such procedures would have to cover far wider areas and require much more labour than by merely plundering all the bamboo in a particular area at one go. While the scientific procedure would generate much more employment and

wages for the adivasis, it would mean much more expense for the comprador-owned paper mills. Taking advantage of the fact that the adivasis' rights over their land and forest are not legally recognised and to the contrary are routinely violated by the State and various feudal and arbitrary exploiters, these paper mills merely plunder the bamboo in collaboration with the administration. Thus the contradiction is not between paper production and the adivasis' rights, but between the unbridled profit motive of the comprador capitalists and the adivasis' control over their means of production.

The adivasis' struggle for their rights over bamboo resources is a part of their overall assertion of their collective rights over land, forest, and natural assets of the region. This is the link between the present struggle and the series of previous struggles of Malkangiri adivasis, such as the Padmagiri-Pandripani struggle against the combine of forest contractors, politicians, and administration (1995-96) and the struggle against Hamco's arbitrary mining (1997-98), apart from a host of other smaller struggles. As with the earlier struggles, the latest bamboo struggle and the charter of demands raised by the MZAS have sparked off widespread discussion and debate among the adivasi masses, and hence increased the scope for deepening the political consciousness and organisation of the adivasis and other forest dwellers in Malkangiri.

— Editor, Comrade

Over the last two years, under the leadership of the MZAS, the people of two panchayats in Malkangiri prevented the cutting of bamboo. But in December 1999 the people of Gondguda, Korkonda, Potrel, Tarlakota, Somnathpur, Kambeda, Mariwada, Bejingwada, Chitrakonda, Badpadar, Paparmetla and Ralegada too have joined the movement led by the Sangh against the bamboo cutting. Obstruction gates have been raised by the people at certain places like Tekpadar of Badpadar panchayat and Kunigada of Ralegada panchayat, to stop the entry and exit of bamboo trucks. As a result, in all the zones of these panchayats bamboo cutting was totally stopped from the last week of December to the time of this writing (first week of February 2000).

Along with this movement, timber cutting too at Katapali-6 and Surlukonda has been stopped. This time the contractors have stayed away,

have not exposed themselves as yet, and only the forest officials are in the picture. (Last year's timber movement at Ramgiri reserve forest of Koraput area saw similar scenes. When a truckload of timber was seized by the Sangh activists, the forest officials and the collector of Koraput came down to argue that the timber is required for the building of the Rath, so it must be allowed to be removed. The press too started publishing items giving the issue a religious colour, and accusing the Sangh of deliberately starting such an issue during election time.)

To appreciate the significance of the present bamboo struggle, we need to understand the role of bamboo in the life of the adivasis.

Bamboo: a means of production

Bamboo is an indispensable material in the economic, social and cultural life of adivasis in this region. They use its shoots, or "karadis" as food for at least four months of the year. Bamboo constitutes a major part of the adivasis' "sag" (vegetable) along with rice or *mandia*. Many craftsmen among the adivasis and dalits make household items as well as various other articles from bamboo, and earn their livelihood by selling them in the markets. In particular the adivasis in the reserve forests, who have very little land for cultivation because of the oppressive Forest Act, rely very heavily on bamboo for their livelihood. The Bondas and Didoyis of Malkangiri and the Gadabas of Nabrangpur are known to be good bamboo craftsmen. Other adivasis also make an unimaginably large range of articles needed for cultivation, housebuilding, fencing, fishing and hunting. They also use bamboo for miscellaneous purposes such as their musical instruments, medicines, *pooja* and *parab*.

The adivasis make big containers out of bamboo — eg. the *kalki*, *dala*, *gadia*, *tipni*, and the *changda*. In these, they preserve paddy, *mandia*, and other agricultural products. They also make small containers such as *mana* to measure these commodities, and the *kula* and *chaluni* to clean them. The adivasis fence their houses with bamboo, and make *tali*, *kamda*, *atudanga*, and the roof with bamboo. They make *murdi*, *dandar*, *piltati* and *gira* with bamboo to catch fish. For protection from rain and sun they make bamboo *tarlas*, *tarlis*, *chhatadis*, and so on. They use bamboo to make *tati khatias* to sleep on, and *binchabnas* to fan themselves with. The adivasi is born on a bamboo cot; swings in a bamboo *jhulna*; dances with bamboo instruments like *taila*, *kathibadya*, *sarangi*, and *bansi*; hunts

with bamboo bows and arrows; climbs the *salap* tree for a drink with the help of a bamboo *salap dunga*. Finally, after death, the adivasi is carried on a bamboo *dandia* to the burning ground. Thus bamboo is indispensable throughout the adivasi's life.

The robbing of bamboo affects the adivasis' social life at every step and from many angles. For example, after marriage, a newly-wed adivasi couple is expected immediately to live separately from their parents, and build a separate house with easily available housing materials such as bamboo, grass, wood and earth. But now because of the unavailability of bamboo young adivasi couples are forced to stay with their parents, which affects their family life, especially the girl's freedom. And because the adivasi girl is new to the art of adjustment with the other members of the boy's family, cases of marriages breaking up are on the rise. Another outcome of the scarcity of bamboos is that the adivasi hunter does not get from the bushes the exact piece of bamboo (in the particular stage of maturity) that he requires for his bow. The same is true for the musician who does not get a specific piece of bamboo required for his/her musical instrument. There is a fierce competition for whatever little bamboo is there in the forest, and quarrels erupt between villages in getting control of bamboo. To fetch bamboo from far-off forests, adivasi youths have to labour for three days, which means a loss of three days' wages.

Plunder by paper mill management

Sewa Paper Mill, a unit of Ballarpur Industries Ltd (BILT) of the Thapar group, has been cutting bamboo ruthlessly from the forests of erstwhile Koraput district (now divided into four districts) for the last 20 years. Particularly after the Thapar group bought the mill, their main purpose has been looting of the bamboo wealth. They do not observe any rules for cutting bamboo as would prevent the bushes from getting depleted. Further, it appears the Thapar group is not interested to continue running its paper mill in Koraput; for this reason its over-exploitation of the bamboo is all the more reckless. Instead of producing paper in Koraput from all the bamboo collected, it produces only pulp from 90 per cent of the bamboo and sends the pulp by train to Ballarpur, near Nagpur in Maharashtra. Whatever paper is produced by Sewa in Koraput is just to hoodwink the people of Orissa and its own employees.

Apart from this, Sewa Paper Mill has formed some non-governmental

organisations (NGOs) through which it has taken large chunks of adivasi land on lease completely illegally. On these lands it is planting acacia and eucalyptus on a huge scale. Because there is a clear-cut law that no non-tribal can buy or lease out adivasi land for commercial purposes, the company has deployed agents in the villages to protect its interests. With each such peasant it has made some agreement, the copy of which is not given to the peasant. He is promised a big amount of money at the end of every agricultural season, and the price of the trees at the end of seven years. But all these promises were found to be false when a copy of the agreement was examined by the Sangh. When three villages under Boipaniguda block of Koraput district raised this question and served their charter of demands to the authorities of the mill, the latter concocted many false police cases in connivance with Boipaniguda police station officers and made mass arrests of adivasi peasants from these three villages.

Thus, on the one hand, the Thapar group shows keen interest in looting bamboo from all the forests of the erstwhile Koraput district, grabbing adivasi lands, and carrying out commercial plantation on them (competing in its loot of natural resources with the Birlas' Mangalam Timbers factory in Nabrangpur, earlier part of undivided Koraput district). On the other hand the Thapars do not intend to run a full-scale paper factory here. Rather they are interested in making pulp to feed their paper factories elsewhere. When the bamboo in these forests is finished, they will close Sewa Paper Mill and leave the area lock, stock and barrel, just as Hamco did. (When the mining company Hamco was compelled after an agitation to sign an agreement in favour of the adivasi tenants of Malkangiri, and was compelled at every stage to proceed according to the terms of the agreement, it locked out its venture when the factory was at the construction stage. Hamco's only intention was to loot the tin ore and other precious stones from Malkangiri, not to carry out the high value-addition activity here.)

Revival of the movement in the Tapu area

At one time, Sangh members saw bamboo-cutting as a source of employment for a large number of adivasis. So, struggles related to bamboo centred on better wages for bamboo-cutting labour. However, because of the Sangh's movement against timber-cutting and the adivasis' growing

awareness of their collective rights over all forest produce, struggles to prevent bamboo cutting began about three years ago. These struggles intensified immediately after the MZAS's third conference in February 1997. Since then bamboo struggles, small and large, have been taking place at certain places under the Sangh's leadership.

One of the zones of the new struggle is the far-off Tapu (island) region of Chittrakonda. About seven years ago, the Sangh conducted a struggle of the adivasis of this area on the question of land. That was a fight against the forest department which had grabbed the land under the people's possession and had carried out plantation over it three years earlier. Hundreds of people participated in mass ploughing of about 1,000 acres of land and reoccupied it. The land thus occupied was given back to the original owners in seven villages. When the police came to arrest them, hundreds of peasants, men and women, offered themselves for arrest, but the only transport vehicle, a launch, would not carry them all. In this way it was a memorable movement that was extended to Malkangiri. The then Collector's office was gheraoed and the Collector was compelled to release them all.

This Tapu area consists of six panchayats and has been cut off from the mainland by Balimela Dam water since 1974. These six panchayats stretch for about 70 km in the mountainous region. Three of them were accessible by land, but boats are needed to reach two or three places. Then one would cross big mountains to go to the three other panchayats by a tortuous route; the other route to this second pocket of three panchayats is by launch, which takes the passengers by the water route inside the water reservoir into Jantri, that is, 70 km away.

During these seven years since the land struggle in 1993, no big movement flared up in this region. But contact had been maintained. After the start of the Hamco struggle, however, this region — about 200 km away from the Hamco area — was not kept in touch with on a regular basis.

It is a practice of the Sangh to go on two occasions to all the panchayats where the Sangh's organisation exists, and cover all the pockets, if not all the villages: One occasion is during election time, and the second is before the annual May Day rally. During the last parliamentary election in September 1999, about 14 teams of the Sangh were engaged in covering its organisational pockets. A capable team under the president of the MZAS toured the Tapu area via the land route. Because of that they could go to

many villages otherwise cut off by steep mountains and streams. They had the chance to discuss with the villagers various problems, beginning with lack of drinking water, shortage of roofing material, corruption in the distribution of below-poverty-line rice through the ration system, etc. Apart from that, important issues such as land and bamboo were also discussed. Further meetings were planned in the following month at Samikbandha, bordering A.P.. Afterwards, some programme or the other was regularly taken up every month and attempts were made to consolidate the village-level and panchayat-level organisations.

During such consolidation work, the bamboo issue was discussed far and wide at the village and panchayat levels. Genuine support poured in for the preparations for struggle over the bamboo issue. It was meticulously planned by the three panchayat committees. A struggle committee was formed for running the struggle.

Spread of the movement to other areas

In the mean time, another pocket, Mariwada, which is about 50 km away from this area towards the Sangh's district office (at Tarlakota), demanded struggle action over timber which had been forcibly cut by the contractors. The decision to start a timber struggle in Mariwada area was taken along with the decision to start the struggle over adivasis' right to bamboo in the Tapu area. When it was started, it was planned to extend the struggle to another pocket between Malkangiri and the Sangh office known as D Zone, which runs for about 30 km over six panchayats. During 1997-98, the D Zone area had taken up the bamboo movement successfully under the Sangh's leadership. But later on, the people informed the Sangh that the bamboo was flowering (a sign of the trees dying). So Sewa Paper Mill was told to take away these flowering bamboos, which were otherwise useless. However, Sewa, while cutting the old bamboo, also cut much of the good bamboo. In 1999, they were stopped from doing this. So, with this previous experience, extension of the agitation on the bamboo question to the D Zone was a must. The people of this region would have just to be informed, and the local Sangh committee could be entrusted with the task of mobilisation and propagation.

After knowing the details of the Sangh's agitational plan, the panchayat committee leaders as well as the people of the area assured the president of MZAS that they would continue the struggle and keep on informing

the Sangh about their day to day activities; that the leadership must go for their more important work. For that, of course, they would have to travel by foot for a day, covering about 50 km to make it to the Sangh office. A barricade was erected to obstruct vehicles of the paper mill at two places. These barricades are called gates. They are means of struggle devised by the people to assert their authority to regulate the traffic, mainly of the enemy, into their area. During struggle against Hamco, and also during the timber struggle in Padmagiri-Pandrapani area, such gates proved successful. These gates were guarded day and night by 50 to 100 people from different villages. The struggle committee would decide the arrangements for guarding. The place of guarding would also be the place of daily meetings.

The struggle against timber felling also picked up momentum in Mariwada pocket during these days and extended to some bamboo pockets. Controversy with some PWG contacts in this context also came to the fore, but these were counter-argued, and a rally was held on January 25 at Tentuliguda village to propagate and project the Sangh's views on bamboo and timber. It was attended by about 1,000 people. All the main leaders of the Sangh addressed this and explained the Sangh's policy. The charter of demands served to the government and to the paper company was read out. Leaflets published for the bamboo and timber movements were also explained to the people.

Paper mill authorities' stand

Now, when the struggle started in December 1999 the Sewa Paper Mill officials came to the Sangh office regularly hoping for some sort of agreement or compromise. They offered to fulfil any material or cash demand of the Sangh. However, they were informed that the Sangh is fighting for the demands of the adivasis and their right over bamboo. They were told that the Sangh bans any bamboo cutting by the company or any other such body. The officials returned and tried to start bamboo cutting again, but this was stopped by hundreds of adivasis on that very day.

Afterwards the manager of the mill came with an application to the Sangh president, telling him how helpful they (the mill) had been all these days to the adivasis of Malkangiri. They explained that they were one of the units of BILT — Sewa, Jeypore and Koraput. They take bamboos

from Malkangiri on behalf of the forest department and the Orissa Forest Development Corporation. They have given employment to about 25,000 workers over the course of the year, and have increased the workers' wages from Rs 45 to Rs 50 per day. The rate for carrying a bundle of bamboo for 100 metres has been increased from Rs 1.50 paise to Rs 1.80 paise. For sizing and binding each bundle, the rate has been increased from Rs 47 to Rs 57, and the cutting charge from Rs 4.70 to Rs 5.15. The Sewa management claimed that they have kept a pharmacist for the treatment of the workers, and are regularly providing drinking water and P.W.F.P. rice to every camp. Finally, they claimed not to have done anything against the adivasis. "Whatever claims you have against the government, fight against them. Because of your stoppage of work, hundreds of coolies are leaving their villages and going to distant destinations to work as *dadan* labourers. So the work must be re-started immediately."

This time, in a step forward, the Sangh's tribal representatives faced the officers of the company at the negotiating table without the help of advisers. The tribal representatives served the Sangh's charter of demands on the company officers, and argued with them, telling how the Sangh is fighting for the interests of lakhs of adivasis and banbasis, and how it is a just cause. They described the role of bamboo in the adivasis' social, economic and cultural life. They argued that this was in fact a long pending demand. Whoever leases the bamboo cutting rights to Sewa Paper Mill — ie the Orissa government — has no concern for the interests of the adivasis. So the legality of BILT is not recognised by the Adibasi Sangh, and no further loot would be allowed. With regard to the labourers, they argued that all the statements made by the company are false; but that is a separate issue.

In this argument the tribal representatives also showed how dishonest the Sewa Paper Mill authorities are, by referring to the pocket (mentioned above) where Sewa had been asked to take away only the flowering bamboo but had cut all the good bamboo as well. Later, the Sewa authorities sat with the Sangh and acknowledged that what they had done in that pocket was wrong, and that they would first take permission from the Sangh in the Sangh's zone before doing anything. The Sangh representatives asked, how on this occasion did you start cutting with outside workers and without informing anyone? The mill authorities begged pardon for this, and promised not to do so again. Thus the first round of

negotiations ended without a conclusion.

Struggle advances

The movement rose to a higher pitch by mid-January 2000, when adivasis manning the gates did not allow even any other vehicles into the area. The state elections were approaching. That particular pocket of Badpadar-Papermetla is known as "Naxal-infested", according to the police terminology. A bigger confrontation was widely anticipated. The police went there twice, got the charter of demands from the activists, and went back. Later on it was decided that since the movement would continue for months, the Sangh should not unnecessarily antagonise local tradesmen who in general have been cooperative with the Sangh's programmes. Moreover, people of the other areas should not think that this is a practical ploy of the PWG to boycott elections, though organised in a different manner.

Hence it was decided that only the bamboo trucks and vehicles of Sewa Paper Mill, and the forest officials, would be stopped. Other vehicles and persons would be allowed only after verification.

In another pocket there was an argument with the village-level supporters of the PWG. They mainly argued on the lines of the Sewa Paper Mill officials' argument. Thus a public debate ensued everywhere; heated discussions are going on about how the adivasis are affected by such ruthless loot. The people are asking: why have all the rules regarding bamboo-cutting been thrown to the winds? Why has no government agency or paper mill taken up bamboo plantation work according to the law? Were adivasis ever consulted while leasing out bamboo to the companies? Should the government not leave some bamboo jungles intact from the start itself? Is not the right of the adivasis over forest products primary, because of their dependence on them? What right does the government have to hand over all this to the private houses, depriving millions of their basic rights? Now all these questions are being actively discussed among the people.

In the face of these questions, the government has remained mum to date. Perhaps this is because of the impending state elections; perhaps it is waiting to see whether the agitation withers from within; perhaps it is waiting for an opportune moment to start repressive measures. Meanwhile, the Sangh's charter of demands regarding this issue was submitted

in January and has reached all the authorities. This charter of demands, which is also distributed as a basis of the Sangh's mass propaganda, mentions how, due to reckless cutting for the last 20 years, the bamboo bushes have got cleared and the jungle is shrinking every year. It depicts the dependence of the tribals on bamboo for their food, for self-employment, for an unimaginably large range of materials needed for cultivation, house-building, fencing, fishing and hunting, and for miscellaneous purposes like musical instruments, medicines, pooja and parab.

The main demands of the adivasis with regard to the bamboo cutting are as follows:

- 1) Bamboo should be listed as a minor forest product by the government, and as in the case of other minor forest products, the tribals' right over it should be legally recognised.
- 2) There must be a thorough inquiry by the government into the reckless bamboo-cutting that has taken place over the last over 20 years. The inquiry must bring out how much bamboo has really been cut, and how much plantation carried out, in all the forests of erstwhile Koraput district.
- 3) Unless and until this survey work is completed, there must be a total ban on bamboo cutting. In the meantime no company or governmental/semi-governmental corporation should be given any new lease, nor should there be any renewal of the old leases.
- 4) Since Sewa Paper Mill has rooted out the bamboo bushes and did not abide by any rules, its owners must be punished.
- 5) BILT/Sewa Paper Mill must carry out bamboo plantation in twice the area in which they have cut the bushes.
- 6) During the last 20 years many workers of the mill have died in accidents, but not a single adivasi got any compensation from the mill. All the records must be made public and the families of the workers must receive compensation.

Until all these demands are fulfilled, the movement will continue.

The struggle is going on now. The adivasis are fighting with determination. Assembly elections in Orissa have brought some pressure on the movement, and there may be unexpected developments. The Sangh has called upon the adivasis to integrate their resistance with the struggle of the Souras under the leadership of the Chasi Mulia Samiti in Gajapati district (protesting the death of seven adivasis in the Mandrabaju-Majhiguda police firing), the fight of the Kuis of Phulbani struggling for their right over land, and the rebellion of Keonjhar-Mayurbhanj Santhals over issues of communalism unleashed mainly by Hindutva fundamentalists. The “*bumboo*” of the Phulbani Kui must join its voice with the “*jujee*” of Gajapati, echoing the “*phituri*” of Koraput-Malkangiri and the “*ulugulan*” of the Mundas and Santhals of Keonjhar-Mayurbhanj, so that finally they create a deluge of revolutionary symphony that will submerge the whole of Orissa and extend to other parts of India.*

February 1, 2000.

Postscript (as we go to press):

The bamboo struggle has been postponed temporarily after an agreement was arrived at between the company representatives and forest officials and the Sangh representatives on February 6. This happened after one and a half months in which bamboo cutting and transportation were totally paralysed. MZAS has given one month's time to the authorities to fulfil their promises. If the promises are not fulfilled, the struggle will be re-started. Further details will be given in a future issue of *Comrade*.

March 2, 2000.

* “*Bumboo*”, “*jujee*”, “*phituri*”, and “*ulugulan*” are the words for “revolution” among various tribal communities.

Statement

Hail the 50th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China (1949-76)!

Fifty years ago, on October 1, 1949, the New Democratic Revolution in China was completed under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and its leader Mao Tse-tung. The path of protracted people's war around the axis of the agrarian revolutionary movement and under the leadership of the proletariat and its party (and all that this implied, in terms of revolutionary strategy and tactics and, within that, military strategy and tactics) stood fundamentally vindicated for all third world countries wanting liberation from feudalism and imperialism — ie, wanting real democracy.

For centuries the Chinese people were suppressed by feudalism. For over a century they had also been subjugated, looted and humiliated by imperialism. That the backward and poor masses of Chinese people could, under the leadership of the proletarian party, mobilise themselves to drive out powerful armies of foreign imperialists and native reactionaries; that the seemingly cowed down and fatalistic peasantry could rise up to smash landlord power in the villages; that the once-unorganised mass of 600 million could unite to carry out, in a disciplined fashion, unprecedented sweeping changes, from land reform to the building of cooperatives and finally 50,000 communes; that one of the world's poorest countries could bring about such transformations in production relations and distribution that all its citizens had employment, basic needs, and a life expectancy rivalling far wealthier lands — all this charted, for the overwhelming majority of people of the world, the path to liberation.

The people's democratic State of China was established in October 1949 under the dictatorship of the united front of revolutionary classes

The Mass Line in Action in Revolutionary China

— by a correspondent

The most striking and distinctive feature of the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) was its emphasis on the *mass revolutionary* approach.

The need for the Communist Party to adopt a mass approach is obvious for the period before the capture of state power, when the armed reactionary state power can be overthrown only by drawing on the vast strength of the masses. However, under the leadership of comrade Mao, the CPC *after* the capture of state power developed this approach to an even *higher* level, unfolded innumerable new aspects of this approach, and linked the fate of the revolution in the People's Republic of China to the development of that approach. Proletarian state power was recognised as an instrument not merely for the (doubtless very important) task of improving the material conditions of life of the mass of people, but crucially for raising the consciousness of and mobilising the masses on an even wider scale for deeper socialist transformation. Failing this latter aspect, even the material gains would be insecure.

The following are some of the principles which were implemented and developed during 1949-76 by the People's Republic.

1. *The masses have to win their own liberation.* Liberation cannot be given to them by any saviours. Only by directly participating in revolution are the people made capable of replacing the ruling classes and truly becoming the rulers.

2. *While the Party provides leadership to the masses, people are the real*

authority. They must be made politically conscious and mobilised to exercise that authority. The Party should not fear the masses but should go to the masses with confidence in their collective wisdom and capability.

3. *Correct leadership proceeds on the principle "from the masses, to the masses".*

4. Just as the Party cannot replace the masses, *the masses absolutely require the Party.* The purpose of the Cultural Revolution is to purge, revitalise and reunite the Party at a higher level, inducting in the process the best elements from the masses.

5. *The Party must rely on the workers and poor peasants while uniting all those who can be united.*

6. *Not capital, but labour is decisive in economic development.* The consciousness of labour is the key. When aroused, the masses can achieve things that were previously thought to be unachievable.

Two lines on land reform

Even at the very birth of the People's Republic, two lines could be discerned regarding the masses' participation in their own liberation. The specific context was that, with the surrender of Japan in August 1945, the peasant struggle intensified for seizing and redistributing landlords' land.

At first, the wrong trend in the CPC attempted (through the May Fourth Directive of 1946), to check this spontaneous advance of the peasant masses. The May Fourth Directive no doubt sanctioned retrospectively the confiscations of land belonging to traitors who had supported Japan. But it also issued guidelines generally designed to replace confiscation with a programme of "voluntary" sale of landlords' surplus land and to protect rich peasants entirely. Further it said, "We must give fair consideration to the livelihood of the middle and small landlords.... [toward them] we should, wherever possible, adopt a style of mediation and arbitration to solve their disputes with the peasantry." The programme was a programme of ~~state-administered~~ land reform, which would naturally be followed by the nurturing of peasant capitalism: "After the peasants have

fairly and reasonably obtained land, we ought to consolidate their ownership and develop their productive enthusiasm, encouraging them to become more industrious and frugal, to establish their own family and career, and to become wealthy and prosperous...”

Mao repudiated this entire approach, and the CC revised its stand. On October 10, 1947, there came, in Mao's distinctive style, the revolutionary thunderclap of the “Basic Chinese Agrarian Law”:

“China's agrarian system is unjust in the extreme....

Article 1. The agrarian system of feudal and semi-feudal exploitation is abolished. The agrarian system of ‘land to the tiller’ is to be realized.

Article 2. Land ownership rights of all landlords are abolished....

Article 4. All debts incurred in the countryside prior to the reform of the agrarian system are cancelled.

Article 5. *The legal executive organs for the reform of the agrarian system shall be the village peasants' meetings, and the committees elected by them; the assemblies of the poor peasants' leagues and organised and landless and land-poor peasants of villages, and the committees elected by them.... peasant congresses, and committees elected by them.* (emphasis added)

The entire work of investigation, decision and implementation was thus to be carried out not by distinct administrative, legislative and judicial bodies (which serve in bourgeois societies to camouflage the class nature of the state and in fact to secure power in the hands of the bourgeoisie), but instead by a body unifying all these functions, through which the people would *directly* exercise power, directly participate in their own liberation. It was in the course of these gatherings that the extraordinary “speak bitterness” sessions would take place. In these, peasants who for their entire lives had borne the landlord's atrocities and oppression in fear and silence, would come forward for the first time and summon up the courage to charge him with his crimes face to face. It was necessary not to “give” the peasants land, but to mobilise them — to *take* the land, smash the feudal cultural authority, *overthrow landlord rule and establish the workers' and peasants' power.*

Thus took place perhaps the largest transfer of property in history. Three hundred million peasants won control of 117 million acres (for-

merly belonging to perhaps 10-12 million persons), amounting to 44 per cent of all arable land, as well as draft animals, tools and grain. Production soared, parasitic expropriations were done away with, hence the surplus available for investment soared too. It is estimated that the drain (in the form of rent, interest, and farm business profits sucked off by the feudal sections, plus taxes) was 19 per cent of national income before land reform. However, since these feudal sections were merely parasites, net investment in 1949 was only 1-2 per cent of national income. By 1953, after land reform, net investment rose to *20 per cent* of national income. Land reform redirected the surplus once appropriated by the feudal, unproductive sections to productive investment in agriculture and industry. (John Gurley, *China's Economy and the Maoist Strategy*, 1976, p. 238)

While Mao called for killings to be kept to a minimum, he said the trial should be carried out by the *people's courts*, which would both enthuse the masses and act as a check against excesses: “Trial and sentence by the people's courts, a form of struggle provided in the Outline of Agrarian Law, must be carried out in earnest; it is a powerful weapon of the peasant masses for striking at the worst elements among the landlords and rich peasants; it also avoids the mistake of beating and killing without discrimination.” (“On Some Important Problems of the Party's Present Policy”, January 18, 1948.)

There was a further implication of the mass line in land reform. The May Fourth Directive had implicitly hoped that state-administered, orderly land reform would yield peasant capitalism — in which, inevitably, some would have to get rich first. Instead the mass participation in land reform: (i) ensured that the demands of the poor and landless peasantry got accepted as primary (even while carrying along middle peasants and leaving non-feudal rich peasants unharmed); and (ii) resulted in a great democratic upsurge which laid the basis, and created the momentum, for overcoming peasant individualism and moving toward socialism. Once mobilised and enthused, the vast majority would not be willing to stop at merely redistributing private property.

When the masses are mobilised

Great mass mobilisation was applied not only to issues of direct class struggle, but also to issues where the role of class struggle was not so

obvious — the eradication of prostitution, disease, illiteracy, opium addiction, and so on. Here let us take just one instance, that of the anti-opium struggle.

Opium had been systematically smuggled into China by British imperialism during the nineteenth century as a way of looting and dominating the Chinese nation. The Chiang Kai-shek regime had protected this illegal traffic, and even depended on major drug lords to police the cities. On the eve of liberation over 30 large organisations were manufacturing opium illegally and selling it through hundreds of dens in every city with police help.

In 1950, the State Council banned planting or processing of opium. It declared closure of all opium dens. Large dealers were to be awarded death sentences; wealthy intermediate dealers were to get long-jail sentences; and small dealers and addicts who traded were to be given total amnesty on the condition that they turned in their stock to the authorities. They were supported thereafter till they could get employment.

"Every province, county and district took measures to enlist the people in a ban-opium mobilization. Public discussions and rallies were held everywhere with attendance in the tens of thousands at many individual ones. At these meetings confiscated opium was often burned, huge piles of instruments destroyed, and former addicts were encouraged to tell their life stories to dramatize the personal and social evils addiction created. These meetings, as well as radio broadcasts, wall posters, and every other possible medium of publicity, stressed the relation between the already successful widely supported anti-imperialist war and the new anti-drug war. The educational campaign stressed the way in which imperialists had used the drug traffic, ever since England forced it on China through the Opium War, as a double source of exploitation — in terms of both the direct profit it provided and the further enslavement of a subject people which it facilitated....

Meanwhile free treatment centres, essentially offering injections to ease the muscular rigidity set up during detoxification and providing special nutritional supplements... were set up in hospitals, clinics, health stations, etc. No penalties were decreed for addicts, but they were urged to break the habit in three months if they were young or recently addicted, and in six months if they were long-time users. Families, friends, and neighbours were

mobilized to encourage these efforts.... [B]y the end of 1951 drug addiction was no longer a general social problem in China and... by the end of 1952 it was difficult to find an individual case in the country." (Annette Rubinstein; "How China Got Rid of Opium", *Monthly Review*, October 1973)

The great health campaigns — against venereal disease, against schistosomiasis (snail fever), for general sanitation, and so on, as well as for training a huge number of medical personnel (barefoot doctors) — merit a detailed description, and would illustrate the same point: instead of mere administrative measures, the crux of the effort was to rouse the masses, make them conscious of politics of the issue at hand, and unleash their great capacity through the campaign.

The people are the real authority

In the liberation struggle one of the most important pieces of propaganda in favour of the communists was that the Red Army was not a new overlord like so many armies before it. Here for the first time was an army whose very charter commanded it to not to take a thing from the people without payment, to repair/compensate any damage caused, to speak politely, and to behave properly with women. These instructions (and the severe punishment to those who violated them) were merely expressions of an underlying stand, that the Chinese people themselves were to be made the real masters of the land, and the Red Army was a *people's* army, to *serve* the people.

What applied to the Red Army applied even more to the Party. The masses came to understand this step by step. In the final stage of the liberation struggle, as the revolution moved to the strategic offensive, the CPC took the daring step of exposing its membership in the liberated base areas before the people — for the purpose of carrying out a rectification campaign. It is significant that the Party chose, as the instrument of its own rectification not merely a higher committee, but the *masses*.

The most dramatic section of William Hinton's *Fanshen*, an epic account of the land reform struggle in a single Chinese village during 1946-49, describes how the Party membership of Long Bow village reveal themselves for the first time before the peasant association delegates, admit their errors and subject themselves to self-criticism and criticism

from the assembled peasants; how a section of peasants, because of small vested interests or individual grievances, attempt to persecute all the party members; but how the collective wisdom of the peasants eventually prevails, and treats the party members fairly. The entire process, difficult and risk-fraught, results in raising the consciousness of the peasants, purifying the party, and strengthening the bonds between the masses and the party. We can already see in this the sowing of the seeds of the Cultural Revolution itself.

The principle embodied in this process — that *the party provides the leadership, but that the masses are the real authority* — required great struggle to actually implement. For against it stood the weight of millennia of contrary tradition and old ideology. It required of each comrade a struggle against *himself or herself*, to submit to this authority and this process.

Who fears the people?

On May 26, 1956, shortly after Khrushchev's secret speech at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU and the confusion it infused throughout the world communist camp, Mao delivered his famous speech "Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom, a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend". The "Hundred Flowers" campaign had two closely linked purposes:

— First, to emphasize the continuing existence of counter-revolutionary forces in China (disproving the claims of Liu Shao-chi and his supporters that the bourgeoisie had been transformed) and to encourage people to recognise, debate and understand the nature of such counter-revolutionary forces, and on this basis to struggle against them;

— Secondly, to encourage people to struggle in a healthy way against those wrong and bureaucratic tendencies in the Communist Party itself which attempted to suppress legitimate criticism from the people. Liu and his supporters feared the second purpose most of all.

Within a very short time, two events were to take place in other socialist countries which proved the timeliness of Mao's initiative. Riots took place in June 1956 at Poznan, Poland, and a counter-revolutionary rebellion took place in Hungary in October 1956. Mao pointed out that some East European countries had not "trained their proletariat in class struggle to help them learn how to draw a clear distinction between people and the enemy, between right and wrong, and between materialism and ideal-

ism, and now they have to reap what they have sown...." Thus the Hundred Flowers campaign was to train the people to draw such a clear

Because of his confidence in the masses, Mao did not see the events in Poland and Hungary as a purely negative phenomenon. He said in a speech to the Second Session of the Eighth Central Committee: "Since there is a fire in Poland and Hungary, it will blaze up sooner or later. Which is better, to let the fire blaze, or not to let it? Fire cannot be wrapped in paper. Now that fires have blazed up, that's just fine. In this way numerous counter-revolutionaries in Hungary have exposed themselves. The Hungarian incident has educated the Hungarian people and at the same time some comrades in the Soviet Union as well as Chinese comrades (Nov. 15, 1956, Selected Works, V, p. 337)

Referring to the demands of East European pro-American imperialist circles for "democracy", Mao bluntly told a conference of party committee secretaries: "There is nothing terrifying about great democracy. This score I do not see eye to eye with some comrades among you, who seem scared of it. In my view, should great democracy come about, you should not be scared of it, and second, you should make an analysis of the words and deeds of its advocates. In pushing their so-called 'democracy', those bad types are bound to say or do something wrong which will only expose and isolate them." (Jan. 1957, Selected Works, p. 357)

But there was a further complication in carrying out the Hundred Flowers campaign. The right wing *within the Party* attempted to mar the campaign. They suppressed the fact that in Mao's conception the *purpose and frame* of a "hundred flowers blooming" and a "hundred schools of thought contending" was *to promote socialism*: "Blooming and contending" was not to mean freedom to the bourgeoisie to propagate against the working class and peddle reactionary trash. Mao had already made clear that dictatorship of the proletariat, or proletarian democracy, had two aspects: on the one hand, democracy for all sections of the *people*, and on the other, *suppression of the bourgeoisie*. Yet this crucial stipulation was deliberately omitted in reporting and discussing the campaign. It thus gave the green signal for all sorts of reactionary mud to drown the voice of workers and peasants. Indeed, during the period between May 1956 and June 1957, there were repeated eruptions of reactionary and pro-capitalist writings, rightist big-character posters

protests organised by the erstwhile ruling class sections in the colleges. At the same time posters put up by worker and peasant students praising or defending the Party were torn down. Texts appeared calling for an end to Party control of education, and for the establishment of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. There were a few murders of Party cadres. And students of the erstwhile elite or exploiting classes (constituting then 80 per cent of the total students) held public demonstrations in Wuhan.

Yet even such developments were instructive — in that they taught by negative example. In their haste, as Mao had predicted, the reactionary sections overplayed their hand. Extreme elements gave calls for killing all communists, dismantling socialism, and so on.

These attempts at open restoration of capitalism opened the eyes of large sections of the masses and party members to the continuing existence and activity of the class enemy, the possibility of capitalist restoration, and hence the need to continue class struggle. The reactionary circles which were exposed in this period were smashed (although very few were executed — chiefly for murder —, and a few others were sent for spells of educative-corrective labour). These sections were thereafter unable to put up serious resistance.

However, Liu Shao-chi and other capitalist-roaders within the Party managed to remain under cover during this period by diverting the *second* major purpose of the Hundred Flowers campaign (namely, to bring forth workers' and peasants' genuine criticism of bureaucracy and wrong trends in the Party and government). They even managed to bracket genuine criticisms of bureaucracy (coming from the masses) with the right-wing attacks on the Party. Thus, of the two purposes of the "Hundred Flowers" campaign mentioned earlier, only one was largely achieved. (Eventually Liu and his cohorts would not escape. Besides, this experience of mass criticism of the Party was a dress rehearsal for certain aspects of the Cultural Revolution.)

After August 1957, an anti-rightist drive was launched by the Party, targeting those die-hard elements who preached rebellion against socialism. But the Hundred Flowers movement itself continued in a new form: workers and peasants were encouraged to put up big-character posters and express their own ideas, which had been suppressed or drowned out during the earlier phase.

The greatest democratic exercise in human history

The Cultural Revolution was to revive the practice of mass criticism of the Party implemented during the Hundred Flowers phase, but with the explicit aim this time that the purpose of such criticism was to promote socialism. (This trend had been obscured by interested quarters within the Party in the Hundred Flowers phase — as mentioned earlier.)

By 1962 Mao was asserting even more strongly the need for encouraging the masses to voice their opinions regarding the Party freely. In a brilliant speech ("Talk at an Enlarged Working Conference Convened by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China", January 30, 1962) he showed in detail how centralism is meaningless and impossible without full proletarian democracy both inside *and* outside the Party. He bluntly said: "It seems that some of our comrades still don't understand democratic centralism as described by Marx and Lenin.... They are afraid of the masses, afraid of the masses speaking out, afraid of mass criticism.... The more they're afraid, the more they're going to be haunted by ghosts." He warned party officials who tried to suppress the masses: "Shirking responsibility, fearing to shoulder it and forbidding people to speak out as if one were a tiger whose backside no one dares touch — ten out of ten who adopt this attitude will fail. People will always speak out sooner or later. You think that people really won't dare to touch the backsides of tigers like you? They bloody well will!"

As the "tigers" continued to tighten their grip on the Party apparatus and on the state apparatus, leading Mao in 1963 to warn of the danger of the Communist Party becoming "a revisionist party or a fascist party", with the result that "the whole of China would change its colour", Mao prepared for launching the greatest democratic exercise in human history, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The opening shots were fired in 1965 with the criticisms of certain plays and writings of the early 1960s which satirised Mao and the Great Leap. On June 1, 1965, the new editors of the *People's Daily* hailed Mao's call for "sweeping away a horde of monsters that have entrenched themselves in ideological and cultural positions." Over the next three stormy years, the cultural revolution was spread to every institution, every factory, commune, school, and party and mass organisation, demanding that every mode of operation be re-examined. The mass line and socialism were taken as the standard with which to judge the conduct and values of individuals and institu-

tions. Unprecedented new forms were found which institutionalised the proletarian-democratic challenge to bureaucracy and hierarchy.

Mao on August 5, 1966, confronted the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee with his *own* big-character poster "Bombard the Headquarters". Then he drove through, with a wafer-thin majority, support for the GPCR. The CC's directive of August 8, 1966, "The Sixteen Points", drew up masterful guidelines for the GPCR.

For fighting revisionism and counter-revolution, Mao had long ago made clear that the public security system was not enough: "...there are also a few comrades doing public security work who don't rely on the masses or on the Party. In ferreting out counter-revolutionaries, they don't follow the line of working through the masses under the leadership of the Party committees, but rely solely on secret work, on so-called professional work. Professional work is necessary; investigation and interrogation are absolutely necessary in dealing with counter-revolutionaries. But the most important thing is to follow the mass line under the leadership of the Party committee. It is especially necessary to rely on the masses and the Party in exercising dictatorship over the reactionary classes as a whole. Dictatorship over the reactionary classes does not mean the physical elimination of all reactionary class elements; the aim is to remould them, to remould them by suitable methods, to make them into new men. Without broad democracy for the people, it is impossible for the dictatorship of the proletariat to be consolidated or for political power to be stable." ("Talk at an Enlarged Working Conference...")

And so the Sixteen Points, while stating that "The main target of of the present movement is those within the party who are in authority and are taking the capitalist road", stipulated that "The outcome of this Great Cultural Revolution will be determined by whether the party leadership does or does not dare boldly to arouse the masses.... In the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the only method is for the masses to liberate themselves, and any method of doing things on their behalf must not be used. Trust the masses, rely on them and respect their initiative. Cast out fear."

In the summer of 1966 — 17 years after the establishment of the people's republic and 10 years after the launching of the socialist transformation — university and middle school students got organised as red guards and became conscious of the gap between revolutionary ideals

and the existing educational system, which was directed towards training specialists divorced from production and political engagement. The red guards launched an attack on the "four olds" (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits), and against the capitalist roaders within the party, the state, and the schools.

On August 18, a million red guards rallied at Beijing, and by late November, seven more such rallies were held there with 13 million red guards from all over China. The streets of Beijing became a great school of renewing the revolution. At any time two million red guards would be in the capital, with the People's Liberation Army making arrangements for feeding and lodging them with the help of the local population, and training them in marching, latrine discipline, erecting canteens, and dormitories. The red guards were not allowed to carry weapons, nor to arrest or try anyone, but to criticise and repudiate the "four olds", propagate among the masses, and arouse their participation. They spread the ferment of the GPCR throughout the country. No doubt they also committed many mistakes, but as Mao repeated time and again over the decades mistakes are inevitable in any revolutionary practice: understanding the objective world is a process, and the point is to learn from the mistakes.

The red guard movement did not disrupt productive activities of the workers and peasants; rather, it served to rouse them. In the streets innumerable big-character posters criticising the wrong tendencies and capitalist roaders were read with eagerness by the masses. By late 1966 and 1967, workers seized control of factories and major cities. Power passed to the hands of new revolutionary committees. Shanghai, China's largest and most industrialized city, with a population of 12 million, where the Party had the strongest roots among the workers, took the lead.

Ever since 1958, when the Great Leap Forward began, the Shanghai workers had attacked one-man management, the piece-rate system and over-reliance on material incentives. They had relied on increasing the consciousness of workers for improving production and for participating in management, and ensured the participation of the managements in physical labour. In sum, they had put politics in command and unleashed the innovative and creative capacities of workers. Nor did the Shanghai workers give up their struggle when the Great Leap policies were in retreat after the natural disasters of 1960. Thus now a militant and experienced core of worker-activists was able to lead the Shanghai working class in

overthrowing the city's top officials on the capitalist road (the secretary of the Party bureau and the mayor), and in establishing a city-wide headquarter of the revolutionary workers. When the top officials rejected the workers' demands, the workers seized a train bound for Beijing. The authorities halted the train at Anting, and negotiations began with the workers. The Cultural Revolution Group despatched Chang Ch'un-ch'iao, propaganda head of the Shanghai party committee, to resolve the issue; he upheld the workers' demands. The centre of revolutionary activity had now shifted to the working class of Shanghai; the GPCR had deepened its roots.

The Shanghai Party committee retaliated by trying to manipulate divisions among the workers, and buy off a section of the workers with higher wages and illegal cash payments; it launched a strike to close major plants, the railroads and the docks. The Workers' Headquarters responded to this by issuing a call on January 5, 1967, for the unity of the people of Shanghai and the restoration of production and services. On January 6, a million-strong rally brought down the Shanghai Party committee and government. Fifty representatives nominated by the Workers' Headquarters from factories, government offices and universities formed the Fighting Line Command, the city's new provisional leading body. The new leadership's approach to problems was to carry out on-the-spot investigation and resolution. The rebel workers joined hands with the students to quickly restore order and all services.

The success of the GPCR would rest on how effectively it implemented Mao's directive to unite, in the course of making revolution, with all those who could be united with. The Sixteen Points had explicitly stated that in ordinary situations, the good and comparatively good cadres were the great majority.

In early 1967 itself, Mao began the process of rebuilding and reuniting the Party, and consolidating the new revolutionary committees. Every effort was made to shun sectarianism and to involve in these committees wide sections, including of the older cadres. No doubt there remained in these revolutionary committees cadres who were opposed to the GPCR — who disguised their opposition and engaged in token self-criticism. But the only check on such elements could be popular participation and control, mass criticism, and direct supervision of the Party and the government by the people.

The mass line in promoting production

The GPCR was not only carried out in the political and cultural spheres; it also extended to the sphere of production. Contrary to the banal propaganda of the bourgeoisie that the GPCR disrupted productive activity, the GPCR actually made new breakthroughs in production. Its very slogan was "*Grasp revolution, promote production*", that is, it was necessary to raise political consciousness in order to increase production, but increased consciousness was not in itself enough: this had to be tested by practice. (In this, the GPCR merely picked up from where the Great Leap had ended. Nearly all the elements of the GPCR in the sphere of production can be found in some form in the Great Leap.) Two outstanding instances of the implementation of the correct revolutionary line were widely propagated throughout the country, in order that people learn from them and creatively implement the same ideas in their own specific contexts: "in agriculture, learn from Tachai; in industry, learn from Tach'ing". At the core of both these examples was the mass line.

Tachai

When Liu Shao-chi found he could not oppose the formation of communes, he decided to patronise a brigade and get identified with its 'success', so as to promote his line. He and his wife Wang Kuang-mei chose Taoyuan, six hours from Beijing. Taoyuan was a well-watered brigade, with ample land. Liu and Wang promoted as leader of the brigade Kwan Ching-tung, an agro-technician of upper-middle peasant background; Wang in fact directly led a 'work-team' which visited the brigade and used third-degree methods to attack those who opposed Kwan. Liu ensured that the brigade received special allocations of fertilizers, high-yield seeds, and heavy financial aid for building roads, laying on electricity, buying machinery and so on. The route to agricultural development, as exemplified by Taoyuan, was to concentrate on the best land, pump in capital, and strengthen hierarchy in the brigade. But in fact Taoyuan, despite all the aid it got during Liu's heyday, never matched the achievements of Tachai; it only improved much later, after it was reorganised during the GPCR under the leadership of a poor peasant who had been persecuted by Wang Kuang-mei (*China: The Quality of Life*, Wilfred Burchett and Rewi Alley).

It was in November 1964 that Mao launched the slogan "In Agriculture Learn from Tachai", a brigade (and village) of just 88 households in the Taihang Mountains of North China's Shansi province. The brigade, led by the former landless peasant Ch'en Yung-kuei (seconded and later succeeded by the woman cadre Sun Li-ying, who had been a slave child sold to a landlord), had the most disadvantageous physical conditions imaginable: just seven gullies and the intermediate ridges. Its members lived in scooped earth caves. They had no regular source of water (though they were subject to sudden flash floods), and yields before 1955 were just 750 kilograms per hectare of millet and sorghum.

The Tachai brigade overcame these daunting conditions by grasping the correct political line. Instead of surrendering to the objective conditions, it mobilised and inspired labour to change the conditions. The Tachai brigade used sheer labour to solve its problems of land and water: *creating* farmland out of the rocky, steep slopes, by levelling, moving soil from one spot to another, and creating (and innovating) terraces; joining various small plots together; constructing a four-mile canal to the village; building water storage facilities against prolonged drought; and making dams which prevented flash floods. All this was done without any assistance from the state. The brigade even declined state aid when, in 1963, floods swept away land, crops, and houses. Yields at Tachai by the mid-1970s exceeded seven tonnes per hectare — a remarkable figure for such conditions. A number of other economic activities too were generated — small industry, an aluminite plant, a coal pit, a motorized transport team. Per capita income rose by more than eight times in real terms between 1953 and 1973.

The key to achieving these results was not increasing private plots or individual incentives, but increasing socialist consciousness among the peasants. Thus the system of calculating payments to each member was simplified. Once a year the villagers met to evaluate each member on the basis of attitude (politics), skill and work output. Thereafter, using this measure, calculating payments required recording only the number of days worked (rather than hours worked, specific jobs performed, and performance). As it worked in Tachai, this system reduced the need for complicated and time-consuming book-keeping and supervision, and replaced them with the members' own efforts and heightened awareness. But it required that the members be inspired to put in their best efforts —

failing which the lazy would benefit at the cost of the hard-working. Collective incentives were emphasized over individual incentives. Moreover, a comprehensive system of security ensured the grain needs of every family, including those which were handicapped in some way — in this way introducing some elements of the communist principle of "to each according to his need".

Tachai also showed the way forward for Chinese agriculture to modernise: It harnessed the vast unemployed labour of the village (especially during the winter months) and created capital out of labour. By 1973 it was allocating 24 per cent of its revenues toward capital construction and mechanisation. (Many of its long-term investments — as was the case with brigades and communes throughout China — began to yield fruit only in the late 1970s and early 1980s, whereupon the Chinese revisionist rulers promptly credited these gains to their own economic policies!) All this, even as Tachai was able to hand over to the state increasing supplies of marketable grain.

To carry this out successfully, Chen Yung-kuei organised many discussions of Mao's writings among the villagers. The villagers debated and grasped the essence of dialectics. They realised that in order to increase the productive forces they had to change production relations; for which they had to inspire people to put their collective interests over their individual interests; even while ensuring that people actually reaped the material rewards of such efforts. The leadership consistently practised democracy, participated in labour, and acted as a pace-setter for the rest of the brigade. It was on the basis of heightened consciousness that the Tachai villagers rejected Liu Shao-chi's "four freedoms" (freedom to buy and sell land; to hire tenants; to select crops for planting, free markets and pricing) and supplied the state with double their quota of grain.

As a living example of the feasibility and rewards of Mao's policies, Tachai had to face attacks from the capitalist roaders throughout. Since they were waging class struggle, it was only natural that the Tachai villagers faced resistance from the class enemy. In the early 1950s itself, Ch'en Yung-kuei faced opposition and sabotage from the higher leadership when he took the initiative to form an advanced co-operative. Later too, outside work teams were sent by the top Party officials to overturn the leadership. Yet Tachai managed to overcome these hurdles and to persevere, moving from success to success. Years after Mao's death, the

revisionist rulers had to exert themselves to smash the local leadership and break up the brigade in the face of determined resistance by the villagers, and then had to concoct a barrage of false statistics in order to defame the Tachai line and leadership.

Tach'ing

On September 26, 1959, just five days before the tenth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, drillers in the Sang Liao basin struck oil. The drillers named the well "Tach'ing" (Great Celebration), which name was later adopted for the whole field. It came at a crucial moment for the People's Republic: only a few days later, Khrushchev, after a summit with the Americans, was to go back on his promise to help China's nuclear programme. Within eight months the USSR withdrew all its cooperation in all spheres of industry, including oil. But with the development of Tach'ing, China was able, in just four years, to move from complete dependence on Soviet oil to basic self-sufficiency. By 1973 China was producing 50 million tonnes of oil.

Had Tach'ing merely been a rich oil find, it would not have merited special attention, nor would there have been much meaning in Mao's slogan "In industry, learn from Tach'ing". Tach'ing's special features, the features from which all socialist industry could learn, were the following:

1) The workers, technicians and leading cadre of Tach'ing did not rely solely on received wisdom but decided to "discover the truth through practice". The advice of earlier Western experts, later Japanese experts and finally Soviet experts was that there was no oil in the Sung Liao basin, and that China in general should reconcile itself to dependence on foreign oil. However, the workers and technicians of this field, inspired by the principles of the Great Leap, and having read and discussed Mao's works "On Contradiction" and "On Practice", decided to persist. After a careful study of advanced prospecting techniques and the geological conditions, they came to the conclusion that there were indeed huge quantities of oil and natural gas below the surface. They thus showed how the principle of self-reliance is organically linked to the principle of "practice comes first".

2) There could not have been a more difficult year in which to begin than 1960. Using the series of natural disasters which struck in 1959-60, Liu Shao-chi and his supporters rammed through retrenchment of new investments across the board. Liu's headquarters issued directives to close the field down. Even materials already earmarked for Tach'ing were switched by Liu to other areas. There were no building materials for living quarters; there was no grain to feed the workers; there was a severe shortage of machinery to move the equipment into place; there was no ditch-digging equipment for the pipes which would conduct the oil to collection centres. So the People's Liberation Army units around shared their tents (even that was inadequate); workers and their families built homes from local building material (the first quarters were big holes dug in the ground, covered with poles and dried grass); human muscle-power was used, incredibly, to transport giant machines over several kilometres and into position (with the PLA lending a helping hand); ditches for pipes were dug by hand in even the most inhospitable weather. The workers and technicians of Tach'ing showed that it was labour, not capital, that was crucial for development, and that it was labour that was the source of capital.

3) Tach'ing broke from the established pattern of drilling and pumping out of oil. Drilling at oilfields worldwide is selective and is based on random sampling. But if one drills at the wrong spot, there can be "gushers" or "blow-outs" leading to loss of pressure and requiring expensive pumping systems. Injection of water is used as a last resort when a field is almost exhausted, in order to push the remaining oil to a level at which pumps can get at it.

On the basis of practice, the Tach'ing workers and technicians pursued an entirely different course. The chief engineer told two authors:

"We came to the conclusion that the main contradiction in oil production — that is the presence of oil deep underground when we want it out on top — can only be satisfactorily solved by achieving stable pressure from below to make the oil come out on its own. The field must be treated as a whole so that the oil flows upwards evenly through stable pressure from below. To do that, we were convinced that the essential thing was to have an exact picture of what lay underground, not only of the various levels of oil-bearing

strata, but of all other phenomena. After careful study, our experts listed 20 kinds of materials and 72 categories of data from every test bore as the necessary criteria for getting that picture. For every metre drilled, we took up to ten samples of the core to be submitted to laboratory analysis. Altogether we took out a total of 34 kilometres of core; 560,000 samples of core material were analysed and 3.8 million comparisons of data were made, based on the different characteristics of the various drillings. In this way we were able to draw up exact charts of the situation underground, based on scientific reality — a principle on which Chairman Mao lays the greatest stress.

"The work was not done only by technicians like us, but by workers, cadres and specialists living and working together on the drilling sites as a three-in-one combination, a single team.... [T]he wells are irregularly spaced. That is because there is no hit-and-miss boring." (Burchett and Alley, p. 106)

Water was injected at a steady rate from the very outset, enabling an even pressure and preventing losses. Rather than a few large wells, Tach'ing struck on the idea of putting up thousands of small wells, from which oil was sent by pipe to collection centres. The only derricks were to be found at places where new drilling was going on. (This also had a military implication: rather than a few big targets, there were thousands of small brick shelters scattered over the grasslands, the bombing of any single one not constituting a major blow to oil production. Importantly, much of the oil was pumped to dispersed underground concrete oil storages.*)

* In fact, the entire decentralisation of economic activity in revolutionary China had a military aspect: in case of invasion, the people's war against the imperialists could be sustained materially. Revolutionary China's application of mass line to military questions even after 1949 merits a separate article: the refusal to be cowed down by nuclear weapons of the superpowers, and perseverance in advancing world revolution; developing a limited nuclear force to deter imperialist threats, and at the same time arousing the world people to fight for peace and for the universal abolition of nuclear weapons; infusing the People's Liberation Army with revolutionary consciousness, eliminating bureaucracy and privilege in the armed forces, and mobilising these forces to serve the people and socialist construction; and organising people's militia under the control of the communes, to carry on countrywide decentralised resistance in case of imperialist invasion.

Throughout this process, the participation of the workers in technical innovation was continuously raised. By the mid-1970s, 11,000 Tach'ing workers reportedly participated in its scientific research network, and 59 per cent of its 5,000 professional and scientific researchers, and the majority of its cadres, were drawn from the ranks of the workers.

4) Typically, when oil is struck around the world, "oil boom towns" spring up, large urban centres where bars and brothels cater to oil riches. These towns are cut off from the surrounding countryside. The workers there earn far more than their peasant neighbours, and have a different lifestyle. Oil production itself leads to the pollution of the surrounding areas, and agriculture suffers. The workers' food supplies come from far away. Workers' families stay in the cities, far from the site where the workers actually work.

Chou En-lai visited Tach'ing in 1962 and advised the party workers to combine industry with agriculture, stock-raising, and fish-breeding, so that the entire community could become autonomous. Living quarters should not be concentrated in one spot — they should be scattered according to where the oil is found. From the outset, in April 1962, women under the leadership of Hsueh Kuei-feng took the initiative to dig up the half-frozen grasslands and start farming in the immediate vicinity of the wells and the residences. Fighting off wolves and the cold, a small team of 20 housewives managed to cultivate five acres and sow it with wheat. Each year the number of housewives joining grew. By 1964 all the wives from the township's 300 households joined, and put 100 acres under crops. By 1977 members of Tach'ing's workers' families sowed 30,000 acres of wheat, ran numerous subsidiary enterprises, and earned an average of 400 yuan per year — a sum equivalent to the wage of a second-class worker in the oilfields. As a result of their struggle, the Tach'ing women's political horizons broadened to the whole world, and they were able to discuss with their menfolk on much more equal terms. Women also innovated to rescue old clothes, cleaning them and either mending them or salvaging parts (cotton padding, cloth, fur, etc). By the mid-70s this activity of a few housewives had become a factory employing 404 women workers, with equipment made by the workers themselves.

Thus the practice of Tach'ing helped to break down the division between agriculture and industry, town and country, men's and women's work.

5. Tach'ing also attacked the division between mental and manual labour. By 1966, Tach'ing had evolved a managerial system which placed workers' rights, initiative, participation, and consciousness at the centre. The charter of the Tach'ing workers' rights makes this clear:

"Unreservedly promote democracy in politics, production, and economy.

Promoting political democracy is aimed principally at ensuring that the whole body of workers, led by the Party, will continue to enhance their proletarian political consciousness and fully exercise 'five major rights':

- (1) the right to struggle against all acts which run counter to the policies and guidelines of the Party and the state and against foul wind and evil atmosphere;
- (2) the right to examine the revolutionization of leading organs and the observance of rules and regulations by the leading cadres;
- (3) the right to criticize the cadres at any conference;
- (4) the right to hear and discuss reports by leading cadres on work; and
- (5) the right to elect basic-level cadres through the democratic process.

Giving free rein to production democracy is aimed at ensuring that the workers will participate in production and technical management, combining specialized management with management by the masses....

In order to safeguard the right of the workers to run their own house, Tach'ing has provided for workers at production posts 'five big functional rights':

- (1) the right to refuse to take orders having nothing to do with their production posts;
- (2) the right to refuse to operate a machine which is due for overhaul;
- (3) the right to refuse to let unqualified personnel operate a machine;
- (4) the right to report immediately to the higher level on hidden dangers in production and, should the higher level fail to give any

instruction or take any action, to suspend production when suspension is the only way to avoid accidents; and
 (5) the right to refuse to commence production where there are no working regulations, quality standards, and safety measures....

[Similar rights are then spelt out for capital construction workers.]

Promotion of economic democracy is designed to ensure that the masses will take part in the economic and food management of the enterprise and exercise four rights:

- (1) the right to fight against all phenomena of extravagance and waste;
- (2) the right to participate in the economic accounting of the enterprise;
- (3) the right to participate in the dining hall management and to examine the accounts of the dining hall;
- (4) the right to participate in the distribution of farm and subsidiary production...."

The article goes on to emphasise the need to practice austerity and stamp out all waste. It then explains that "triple combination" — of leading cadres, workers and technicians — is the most effective way for technical innovations and technical revolution. This must be effected from investigation and study, formulation of plans, drafting of designs, organization of supply of equipment and materials, manufacture of equipment, experiments on the spot and application of results of experiments in production all the way to the summarization and popularisation of results of experiments.

The methods of leadership evolved in Tach'ing were the counterpart of those in Tachai, stressing leadership at the point of production through a "two-line system". The "second line", the leading cadres of the oil field, did not command production directly and did not concern themselves with routine administration, but with "bringing politics to the fore". They gave overall direction by (1) studying the line and policies of the Party, (2) going to the basic level to stay at selected spots, carrying out detailed investigation, (3) sizing up the general situation, pointing out the direction, and grasping the central issues and (4) examining and assisting in the work of the "first line"; seeking out shortcomings and mistakes, and

summing up experiences. The "first line" was responsible for concretely implementing the decisions in day-to-day operations. This "two-line" method ensured maximum contact between leadership and production workers, and that policy was shaped by observation of and participation in the work process. The leading cadre were to "persevere in hard work and plain living without claiming any special privileges"; "persist in physical labour and never be bureaucrats sitting high above the people"; and "persist in being 'honest' and 'strict'". (Hsu Chin-ch'iang, "Hold High the Great Red Banner of the Thought of Mao Tsetung, Further Deepen the Revolutionisation of Enterprises: Basic Experiences in Revolutionisation of the Tach'ing Oil Field", *Economic Research*, April 20, 1966; excerpted in Mark Selden, *The People's Republic of China. A Documentary History of Revolutionary Change*, 1979, p. 583)

Tach'ing was by no means an isolated case: other important advanced fronts of workers' democracy were the Shanghai unions and the 1,00,000-worker-strong Anshan Iron and Steel Works (where the workers, with Mao's specific approval, drew up their own constitution in 1960, along lines similar to those later developed at Tach'ing).

Need to continue relying on the workers and poor peasants

In both Tachai and Tach'ing, as in revolutionary China at large, democracy had an explicit *class content*: reliance was placed on the workers and poor peasants while uniting all those who could be united. As soon as the new democratic tasks had been achieved, this question had come to the fore again. A powerful section of the Party leadership, headed by Liu Shao-chi, wanted to stop the revolution as soon as these tasks were complete. But Mao emphasized that the vast majority of the peasants needed further advance, without which they would in fact retreat. Within a few years of the land reform, 20-25 per cent of the peasant households, lacking draft animals and tools, were forced to sell part of their land, and many more fell into debt. By 1954 the inequality in ownership of means of production between rich peasants and poor peasants had risen to three or four to one, and this inequality continued to sharpen. Mao said that for 60 to 70 percent of the population, "socialism is the only way out.... The only way for the majority of the peasants to shake off poverty, improve their livelihood and fight natural calamities is to unite and go forward along the high road of socialism."

Thus an essential part of the mass line was not to treat the masses as an undifferentiated whole, but to divide them into classes and *rely on the basic sections (workers and poor peasants)*. This applied even after the new democratic revolution, that is, even when it superficially seemed the class differentiation (in terms of *current* income inequality) was not sharp. When summarising various aspects of the "two roads", the revolutionary and the revisionist roads, Ch'en Yung-kuei wrote: "We want to rely on poor and lower middle peasants, but some people say that poor peasants should be relied on only for agrarian reform, while the middle peasants should be relied on for production. They also say that since landlords no longer own land and rich peasants are no longer rich, and since both live on the work points they earn, everyone is on the same footing.... Is that not open class struggle?"

The key principle

The history of the Communist Party of China and the People's Republic of China (till the revisionist seizure of power in 1976) is inexhaustibly rich with examples of the implementation and development of the following principle:

"There are two methods which we Communists must employ in whatever work we do. One is to combine the general with the particular; the other is to combine the leadership with the masses.... In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily 'from the masses, to the masses'. This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge." (Mao Tsetung, "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership", 1943.)

It is this principle we can see in action in 1927, when Mao investigated and upheld the various forms of struggle of the Hunan peasant movement, and drew on these experiences to demolish the Right opportunist arguments then dominant in the CPC. Three decades later, we see it still in action during socialist construction. During the winter of 1957, the slack agricultural season, hundreds of millions of peasants were mobilised for water conservancy, forestry and other projects. They found that even large advanced cooperatives were not big enough to carry out some of these projects on their own. Mao heard that various advanced peasant cooperatives in Honan province, feeling the need to carry out larger irrigation projects, had merged their labour power. In April 1958, quick to sense the potential of this development, he visited the Tsi Yi Ling peasant association in Honan, where such a merger had taken place. When discussions were taking place on what name to give the new form, he approved the name 'commune', and declared that "This is a new creation of the masses".

Through discussions, Mao helped give this new development vastly greater significance: the newly-merged entities would not be restricted to specific limited functions, but they would develop agriculture, accumulate capital, set up infrastructure (include small hydel power), develop small industry and other sideline activities, run schools and hospitals. The commune would also take care of its local security, and organise militia to prepare for imperialist attack. It would carry out planning for most of its economic activities on its own, within the broad framework of the Central plan. The commune was thus an organ of the power of the masses, uniting the worker, the peasant, the student, and the militiaman.

This further development of the concept of the commune was eagerly embraced by the masses. The process of commune formation in China was relatively smooth. Not only had unity among the great majority of peasants been built over the earlier period, but this great majority came to see the objective need for going *further*, towards communes. Thus there was a great commune-formation wave, outstripping all expectations. Communes were formed from *below*, in virtually all of Chinese agriculture, encompassing half a billion people, within just four months of the setting up of the first commune!

Whether it was the first commune, the development of the Tachai brigade, the Tach'ing oilfield, or the revolutionary committees of the Cul-

tural Revolution, all these were creations of the masses. Mao's great leadership consisted in his ability to recognise the potential of these mass creations, develop that potential further, and take these developed ideas back to the vast masses of people, who embraced them and enriched them further with their practice.

Crucial role of the Party

Mao's concept had nothing to do with spontaneity, or devaluation of the role of the Party, or counterposing the Party with the people. Even at the height of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, when he called for bombarding the revisionist headquarters, he emphasized the need to unite with the great majority of cadres, and quickly called for incorporating such cadres in the new revolutionary committees — the new nuclei. In the 1950s, he had penetratingly criticised the formulation that the development of cadres decides everything, saying, "If 'Cadres decide everything', then what about the masses?". Now he said with equal lucidity during the headiest days of the Shanghai workers' commune: "If everything were changed into the commune, then what about the Party?.... There must be a nucleus, no matter what we call it.... The commune must have a Party." It was precisely because the role of the Party was so crucial for the people that the Party had to be purged, revitalised, and reunited at a higher level, *drawing into its fold the most advanced elements of the people*. Thus the building of the Party, and basing it firmly among the masses and mass struggles, was an essential element of the mass line.

The rich legacy of revolutionary China, people's China, is not only a great monument to the potential of human endeavour; it also continues to inspire the communist revolutionaries of the world to more deeply understand the revolutionary mass line and implement its various facets in their work today.