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ALL INDIA KISAN SABHA

16th CONFERENCE

MAYURAM

Presidential Address

Com. A. K. GOPALAN, M.P.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

SIXTEENTH SESSION
OF
ALL INDIA KISAN SABHA

President : **A. K. GOPALAN, M. P.**

Comrade delegates,

Let me begin with paying homage to the martyrs, men and women who died in kisan struggles.

At the outset, let me take this opportunity to thank you all for doing the honour of electing me again as the President of this premier organisation of the Indian Peasantry. In the past, I have tried to carry out my duties as President of the All India Kisan Sabha and even otherwise to the best of my ability and to serve the interests of the vast masses of the peasantry in this country, to stand with them in their struggles, to voice their grievances and demands in Parliament and outside. I hope in the coming periods also I will be able to continue to devote my time and energies towards this purpose.

The past year has been one of magnificent struggles of our peasantry in defence of their vital interests, against inequitable and heavy tax burdens, against food scarcity and for radical agrarian reforms etc. We also saw a reorientation of our organisation's policy towards constructive activities like increased food production, participation in developmental activities, organisation of co-operative movements etc.

The past year also saw a reiteration of the attitude of the ruling party towards some of our most pressing and basic demands. The Nagpur Resolutions of the Congress on ceilings on land holdings and organisation of co-operatives to serve the various needs of the peasantry are welcome moves. However, while welcoming these resolutions, we cannot shut our eyes to the experience of the last 11 years of Congress rule. The fact that the Congress—though belatedly, has been forced into an obligatory acceptance of ceilings on land holding is itself a great victory of the Kisan Sabha who raised this slogan first in this country and has ever since conducted a sustained campaign. But this victory which is as yet only on principle, cannot be and

will not be translated into practice unless we organise and conduct determined struggles in unity with all progressive sections of Indian population, isolate reactionary vested interests both within and outside the ruling party, conduct sustained political and ideological campaigns against them and in the process build up an invincible organisation of our kisan masses to force the unwilling hands of the ruling party to put their professions into practice.

Any illusion that the passing of the Nagpur resolutions by the Congress paves the way for a smooth transformation of the agrarian relations in India is not justified by past experience and the present trends. But at the same time we are justified in assuming that there are considerable sections of progressive and patriotic elements in the ruling party who can be prodded to accept certain programmes and policies and with whom there are chances for the All India Kisan Sabha to co-operate and work out specific measures to regenerate our agrarian economy and improve the lives of the peasant masses. But such possibilities can be converted into reality only by our organised strength and by the sustained mass pressure we can generate through struggles.

The policy of the Kisan Sabha has always been a national one and our programmes have been drawn up in the best interests of the Nation as a whole. Our enemies, the reactionary vested interests, the landlords and big business and their yesmen charge us with narrow sectarian outlook and partisan approach. Nothing can be far from truth than this. From the very beginning we have emphasised the importance of radical agrarian reforms to the development of our national economy and rapid industrialisation. Our slogans and programmes were intended to build up a firm and unshakable base for the economic development of our country. But the Congress Governments at the centre and the States ignored our demands and tried to bypass land reforms. The fiasco of their policy is now proved in real life. Hence our country and her people have been subjected to untold sufferings repeated and chronic food shortage, famines, heavy tax burdens, a disastrous foreign exchange crisis which threatens to undermine our national independence and a creeping inflation.

To a great extent, our present economic crisis can be traced back to the failure of the Congress Government to carry on land reform measures. Why is this so? Because agriculture is not just another sector of our economy. It is the most important sector and it envelopes the largest segment of our population. According to the 1951 census 249 million of our people i.e. 69.8 % of the entire population depend upon agriculture for their livelihood. Out of a total working force of

18 crores 73 lakhs in 1956-57, 11 crores 23 lakhs are employed in agriculture, that is over 71%. It accounted for 49.8% of our national income in 1956-57. Hence any scheme of economic development has to base itself on a strong and dependable agrarian economy. The failure to place our agriculture on firm foundations is the basic cause of the failure of our economic policies.

What is the approach of the Congress Government and the Planning Commission to this question? Fundamentally no one denies the importance of agriculture and its role in the economic life of the country, but what distinguishes us from other people on this question is the approach to the problem and the method of its solution. Here we must demarcate ourselves from those who criticise the Planning Commission and the Government for the supposed industrial bias in the 2nd Five Year Plan and refute the suggestion that the crisis the economy has run into is due to the so-called industrial bias of the Plan. It is not just because comparatively less allocation has been made towards agricultural development.

We are a poor country with inadequate capital resources. The main effort should be to invest available resources in sectors of economy where they are indispensable and without which no advance can be made. Our agriculture is still very backward and per capita yield is the lowest. Therefore the potential for advance in agriculture without widespread technological improvement and vast capital investment is still tremendous. In agriculture, in the present context of our economy, the endeavour in the immediate present must be to utilise to the maximum available human resources.

However, the Congress Governments tried to bypass this issue. The methods sought to be adopted to achieve the production targets of the 2nd Five Year Plan were to rely mainly on its administrative functions and technical improvements, i.e. the allotment of lands as between different crops, price fixation, price support etc., credit policy, irrigation facilities, use of fertilisers, better seeds etc. No doubt all these are important elements in a programme of increased agricultural production. But as experience has shown, the results that can be achieved by those measures alone will not be commensurate with the expenses incurred or with the needs of our economy so long as there is the failure to see the peasant as the central figure in any scheme of increased agricultural production today in our country. In the context of the backwardness of our economy, the question of increased agricultural production is not only a technological question but mainly it is one of organising the vast masses of peasantry to carry out the national

tasks, of enthusing them to put in their best both in terms of labour and spirit towards higher agricultural yields.

What has been the result of this short-sighted, foolish and bureaucratic approach of the Congress? The agricultural production especially of foodgrains lies more or less stagnated during the last 3 or 4 years. Not merely that production has not gone up in relation to the targets of the Plan, but it has also not kept pace with the increase in population. According to the economic survey of the Government of India, the per capital availability of food grains during the last year at 12.3 ozs. per day was the lowest in the past few years even in spite of the vastly increased imports in that year. (1959). The index of national income from the agricultural sector fell from 122.4 in 1954-55 to 118.6 in 1957-58 with 1950-51 as 100. The index of foodgrains production fell from 127.4 in 1955-56 to 118.6 in 1957-58. The area under food crops fell from 215.835 million acres in 1955-56 to 212.717 million acres in 57-58. The production of food grains fell from 65.794 million tons in 1955-56 to 62.026 million tons in 1957-58. The per acre yield of foodgrains have also violently fluctuated during the past few years. Apart from all these the most serious consequence to our economy has been the enormous amount of foreign exchange we had to spend on account of the import of foodgrains during the last few years. During the first 3 years of the 2nd Five Year Plan we imported foodgrains worth Rs. 300 crores. To meet this charge on our resources we had to enter into a number of agreements with U.S.A. under P.L. 480 and such other conditions which threaten our economic stability and pave the way for imperialist intervention in our economic and political life. I give below a comparative statement of area, sown, production and per acre yield during the last 7 years beginning with the 1st year of the 1st 5 Year Plan.

AREA SOWN — IMPORTANT CROPS

(In thousands of acres)

	1951-52	1952-53	1953-54	1954-55	1955-56	1956-57	1957-58
Rice	73,713	74,056	77,318	76,020	77,891	79,320	79,027
Jowar	39,399	43,340	43,882	43,155	42,903	40,367	41,411
Wheat	23,404	24,286	26,394	27,822	30,559	33,580	29,657
Gram	16,876	17,930	19,689	22,852	24,166	24,265	22,405
Total acreage under cereals and pulses	209,599	252,169	269,569	266,527	273,203	275,350	267,372

PRODUCTION—IMPORTANT CROPS

	1951-52	1952-53	1953-54	1954-55	1955-56	1956-57	1957-58
Rice	20,964	22,537	27,769	24,821	27,122	28,282	24,821
Jowar	5,981	7,243	7,954	9,056	6,619	7,249	8,056
Wheat	6,035	7,382	7,890	8,900	8,622	9,314	7,654
Gram	3,334	4,142	4,756	5,532	5,332	6,264	4,754
Total food-grains production	51,175	68,718	66,960	66,960	65,794	68,748	62,026

IMPORTANT CROPS - YIELD PER ACRE

	1951-52	1952-53	1953-54	1954-55	1955-56	1956-57	1957-58
Rice	637	682	805	731	780	799	704
Jowar	340	374	406	470	346	402	436
Wheat	582	681	670	717	632	621	578
Barley	669	805	746	779	735	726	647
Gram	443	517	541	542	494	578	475
Potato	6,117	6,984	6,791	5,910	5,932	5,342	2,853
Sugarcane	2,836	2,632	2,809	3,238	2,925	2,968	2,853
Cotton	76	80	90	89	78	93	92

AVAILABILITY OF CEREALS & PULSES

	CERALS			PULSES		POPULATION		Per capita net availability (in ozs. per day)
	Production Net M. Tons	Imports M. Tons	* Net availability M. Tons	Net availability M. Tons	(Mid-year) Millions	Cereals	Pulses	
1953	43.07	2.00	45.52	7.91	372.3	12.0	2.1	
1954	50.99	0.81	51.62	9.14	377.1	13.4	2.4	
1955	49.16	0.70	50.48	9.43	382.4	13.0	2.4	
1956	48.05	1.42	50.05	9.51	387.4	12.6	2.4	
1957	50.09	3.58	52.85	10.07	392.4	13.2	2.5	
1958	46.21	3.17	49.65	8.06	397.4	12.3	2.0	

* Net availability is calculated on the basis of Net Production and Imports minus exports and also taking into account changes in stocks.

What do these figures show? They show that whatever increase in production we have achieved during the last few years have been fortuitous, that our agriculture has not been able to keep up a steady rise either in total production, or in productivity, that in spite of all the money that have been spent on

the development of agricultural production, the results have been meagre.

Compare this anaemic state of our agriculture to the great success achieved by the Peoples' Republic of China in the field of Agriculture. While we allocated 32.1% during 1st plan and 21.9% during 2nd plan on agriculture, irrigation and community development etc., China allocated less than 10% of total outlay during 1st and 2nd Plans on agriculture; but was able to achieve phenomenal success in production. We have it on the testimony of an official co-operative delegation which visited China during 1956 to study the working of co-operatives in China. The following figures illustrate this:

I. Food production (in tons)		1949	1952	1955
(a) Food crops	...	106.4	151.9	172.0
(b) Paddy	...	47.9	67.3	76.8
(c) Wheat	...	13.6	17.8	22.6
(d) Cotton	...	0.4	1.3	1.5
II. Yield per acre in lbs.				
(a) Food Crops	...	949.0	1226.8	1317.8
(b) Paddy	...	1688.6	2151.7	2386.6
(c) Wheat	...	572.9	632.5	766.3
(d) Cotton	...	144.6	208.8	234.0

These were the figures upto 1955. Since then we know that Chinese agricultural production has increased enormously, a thing unheard in the history of the world. How was this achieved?

"The first question that strikes anybody is, how was all this achieved in such a short period? The question is especially relevant in the context of the history of the formation of agrarian co-operatives in other countries? The reason for the exceptional success of China, therefore, deserves a special study.

The most outstanding development which preceded the movement for cooperativisation was the radical measure of land reforms carried out in China. The nature of these reforms and the unsparing manner and the speed with which they were carried out, influenced the growth of agrarian cooperatives in a measure as no other single factor has done. Before the land reforms, about 10 per cent families of landlords and rich peasants held about 53 per cent of the total area. The middle and the poor peasants who comprised about the 90 per cent of the total number of households held less than 41 per cent of the total area. After the land reforms the maximum holding

hardly exceeds twice the average area available per family. Everybody who could cultivate and wanted to do so, man or woman, was given land. Altogether about 118 million acres out of a total cultivated area of about 275 million acres, were distributed among 300 million peasants. Besides lands, houses belonging to land lords containing about 38 million rooms, about 30 million draught animals, 39 million agricultural implements and about 5 million tons of food-stuffs were confiscated from landlords and re-distributed. The Chinese had thus eliminated at one stroke, in the course of less than 3 years, not only landlordism, but also the vestiges of kulak economy obtaining in China.

“ It was on the basis of a land reform thoroughly completed that we launched the movement for agricultural co-operation. In carrying out the land reform our Party did not take simple and easy way of merely relying on administrative decrees and of ‘bestowing’ land on the peasants. For three solid years after the establishment of the Peoples’ Republic of China we applied ourselves to awakening the class consciousness of the peasants, and particularly of the poor peasants, to the fullest possible extent by following the mass line fully arousing the peasant masses; it accomplished the task of land reform through the struggle of the peasants themselves. Was it necessary for us to spend so much time on it? We consider that the time involved was completely necessary. Because we had used such a method, the peasant masses stood up on their own feet, got themselves organised closely followed the lead of the Communist Party and the Peoples Government, and took the reins of the government and armed forces of the villages firmly into their hands. Thus the land reform succeeded not only in eliminating the landlords as a class and weakening to a great extent rich peasants. The broad masses of the awakened peasants held that exploitation by both land lords and rich peasants was a shameful thing. Conditions were thus created which were favourable to the subsequent socialist transformation of agriculture and helped shorten to a great extent the time needed for agricultural co-operation. ”

Thus we see the great liberating role of thoroughgoing land reforms and its effect on the organisation and mobilisation of the peasant masses for production purposes.

The pre-condition, therefore, for any efficient reorganisation of agriculture is thoroughgoing land reform. Here we must emphasise on basic demands regarding land relations.

1. Vesting of ownership rights in all tenants, regardless of the tenure under which they hold their land today, subject

to restricted right of resumption by small owners. Full security against ejection of sharecroppers.

2. Imposition of ceiling on all peasant buildings without leaving plantation and distribution of surplus land to ejected tenants, agricultural labourers and peasants.

3. Free distribution of all-cultivable waste lands to agricultural labourers and poor peasants.

4. These are our basic demands in regard to land reforms and I wish to take this opportunity to emphasise that the carrying out of this task is the pre condition for co-operativisation. Efforts which try to by-pass these measures are bound to fail and are likely to bring further complications on its wake.

Here I wish to record our appreciation of the efforts of the Kerala Government in the face of very adverse factors and under severe constitutional restrictions in having brought before the legislature a comprehensive and satisfactory measure which to a great extent meets most of the demands of our peasantry.

Now I wish to draw your attention to the loud and heated controversy now whipped up by certain reactionary vested interests in the country against land reform measures in general and ceiling on landholdings and co-operatives in particular. The controversy, though not of immediate practical significance, in view of the halting and half-hearted measures of Congress Governments, has got an ideological importance of its own and we have to take up our positions with clear perspective. What is our attitude to co-operative farming? While stressing the precedent conditions-viz thorough-going land reforms-for the successful organisation of agriculture on co-operatives, we welcome the measure whole heartedly. In the development of planned economy, the advantages of agricultural co-operatives cannot be overestimated. Scattered small-scale peasant proprietorship will in the long run be an impediment to development, the introduction on a wide scale the most upto date and scientific method of cultivation etc. Co-operativisation helps better crop planning, suitable selection of crops, better facilities for permanent improvements of cultural practices, better division and utilisation of labour and increased in cultivable area on the abolition of boundaries. It helps the introduction of higher techniques, increases labour productivity etc. Hence there is no question of our ~~own~~ attitude to co-operative farming. But to make it a success, we must press forward land reforms proposals and also demand that :

1. the peasantry must be educated on the benefits of co-operative farming. Efforts must be taken to raise his cons-

sciousness and at the same time proper propagancla must be carried out in the countryside.

2. it must be voluntary.

3. practically it must be demonstrated by organising co-operative farms wherever possible.

Now I come to certain other problems facing the peasantry. Among them is the heavy tax burden. In this connection, we had warned earlier also that we will resist all inequitable and unjust taxation. However, the Central and State Governments in the name of the Plan and development continue to burden the people with more and more taxes. In this way they are undermining the very basis of the success of planning, viz. the co-operation and enthusiasm of our people.

However, it is not only the Congress Government at Centre and States which continue to burden the peasantry with all sorts of taxes, but certain well meaning and progressive economists have started arguing for higher taxes on the peasantry. The third Plan is on the anvil and we hear voices campaigning for doubling the land revenue, increase in betterment levy, irrigation tax etc. Such demands are often clothed in high sounding phraseology like taking more surplus out of agriculture, agriculture bearing a greater share of the burden of development etc. This argument does not stand scrutiny. This argument would be understandable if a major or even a substantial portion of the taxes today collected by the Centre and States come from direct taxation like corporation, income tax etc. That is not the position. About 70% of the total tax revenue comes from indirect taxation, i.e., taxation on goods, services, etc. which are mainly consumed by the masses. As long as 70% of the population of India is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, the major incidence of taxation falls on India's peasantry. Thus under the present dispensation, agriculture is providing the major surplus for development in the form of taxes.

Secondly, agriculture indirectly is being squeezed by private trade and industry through unequal exchange. A recent study of the price movements of agricultural products and industrial products conducted in Punjab amply proves our contention. The study spread over a period of 15 years beginning with 1939 and ending 1956-57 shows that "out of the eighteen years only during 5 years (1939-40, 41-42, 48-49, 53-54 and 56-57) the terms of trade happened to be favourable to the farmer. The farmers had been at a disadvantage due to the disparity in the movements of prices of commodities offered for sale by them and the prices of commodities purchased by them to an extent

varying between 0.7 to 11.5 per cent as compared with the conditions prevailing in 1938-39. It may be further seen that better terms of exchange in favour of the farmer during the aforesaid five years have been mainly due to the comparatively low prices of food articles. "The low prices of food articles in relation to the level of agricultural prices during the last eight years also withheld to a great extent the fall in overall parity level in view of the disproportionately high prices of clothing material in most of these years".

Similarly, if we take the parity between the prices received for agricultural products and the prices paid for clothing material alone—an important index of the price relationship between farm products and manufactured articles—it was noted that "with the exception of four years (1939-40, 45-46, 48-49 and 50-51) the terms of trade between the above mentioned two sectors have been adversely against the agricultural sector to an extent ranging from 2.6 to -36.3 per cent".

Thus we see that there is a continuous ^{addition} of agricultural income in favour of other sectors of economy and the peasant is squeezed on every occasion. In this situation to talk about agricultural sector being made to pay more for development is a mockery.

Even on an international scale, the dice is heavily loaded against the underdeveloped countries exporting primary products. The latest U.N. statistical year Book brings out again clearly the helplessness of our people faced with stronger economies. While the exports of industrialised countries declined in volume by 3%, the prices received were almost the same as for 1957, whereas in the case of underdeveloped countries, exports of primary products which were slightly greater in volume than in 1957, brought in only 6% less in prices.

Comparing 1957 with 1953, there was an increase in volume of 35 per cent and an increase in price of 5 per cent for exports of industrial countries; and a 22 per cent increase in volume and no difference in price for the exports of the non-industrial industries. ^{countries}.

The ECAFE survey for the year also sharply brings out the deterioration in the terms of trade against the countries of the region. The following is the movement in terms of trade with 1953 as 100:—

1955		104
October	1956	100
April	1957	94
December	1957	78
April	1958	69

It will thus be seen from all this that our agricultural sector has been the worst hit both from the deterioration in the terms of international trade and also internal exchange.

To arrest this trend and to see that the farmer gets a fair share of his toil, it is necessary that the Government take over both internal trade in all important agricultural commodities and foreign trade in most of our export items.

Here again we have to explain our position in regard to State Trading in foodgrains and expose those elements who oppose the scheme and also the inadequacies and ineffectiveness of the scheme now proposed. The General Secretary's report deals in detail with the scheme of state trading now formulated by the Government of India. We have now to take up a campaign in the country to make the scheme more thorough, effective and capable of protecting the farmer and consumer alike.

State Trading is necessary not merely from the point of view of enabling the farmer to get a fair value for his products, it is also necessary from the point of view of protecting the consumer against the depredations, speculators and other anti-social elements who go with the respectable name of traders. The role of private trade in foodgrains especially in our country has been one of unashamed criminal exploitation of scarcity. In the recent past trade has manipulated prices, created artificial scarcity by hoarding stocks, exposed vast population to famines and minted profits out of the misery of ordinary people. Those who now champion the cause of private trade, and shout against State Trading in the name of freedom and democracy etc. should be exposed as the worst enemies of Indian people, as the champions of merchants of death.

I will now come to our tasks in national reconstruction. The Kisan Sabha while leading the peasantry into struggle for land and better life must also lead them in the struggle for more production. Today we must take up the question of higher agricultural production as a national task; while we continue relentlessly our struggles, we must at the same time take upon ourselves the duty of more food production. On this question our approach must be more constructive, co-operative and willing. We must also take up seriously the question of implementing irrigation works, use better cultivation techniques, use of manures, improved seeds etc. We must as far as possible seek and offer co-operation to official agencies like Community Projects, extension services, agricultural department and irrigation staff. But such co-operation will be possible and useful only if at the same time we continue

to expose corruption bureaucracy, political discrimination etc. indulged in by local officials as well as Congress Governments.

This brings us to the question of administrative reforms. The present system of administration effectively shuts out mass mobilisation in nation building activities and inhibits the enthusiastic participation of people by the bureaucratic red-tape and corruption. The way forward is to decentralise the administrative structure, give more powers to panchayats, District Boards etc. Far-reaching structural changes in the administrative set up today is a prime condition for the speedy implementation of national development programmes. Only that way can we hope to bring democracy nearer to the people and evoke the initiative and enthusiasm of our peasant masses for nation-reconstruction.

This is what the appraisal and prospects of the 2nd Five Year Plan issued in May 1958 by the Planning Commission has to say on the relation between administrative reorganisation and fulfilment of Plan targets in agriculture and community development.

“Minor irrigation, which was intended to be a programme undertaken mainly with popular support making the maximum use of local resources and local possibilities of irrigation, has tended to develop into a departmental programme with insufficient public participation. In national extension service and community project areas the provisions for minor irrigation had not been adequately utilised and minor irrigation programmes in these areas needed to be co-ordinated much more fully with the Agricultural Department’s minor irrigation programmes...”

The crux of the problem of reaching every village and every family through Community Development programme lay in the building up of village institution—the panchayat and the co-operative for undertaking village planning.”

A number of reports of the Evaluation Committee on Community Projects and the report of the study team on community development stress the importance of both structural and procedural reform of our public administration to make it more efficient suitable for national reconstruction and capable of drawing in the initiative and participation of the common people. Therefore, we should press for these reforms in all States.

The only State today which has taken up this question in right earnest is the Government of Kerala and I take this opportunity of congratulating them for that.

I now come to the problem of agricultural workers. This problem is more important to us both from the political and

organisational point of view. The agricultural labour constitute a sizeable portion of the rural population. According to the Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee, out of a total of 58 million rural families 17.6 million were agricultural labour families. This was in 1950. Today the position must have worsened due to a number of changes which have taken place in the land relations since then. The total number of agricultural labourers number 35 millions. They have the lowest per capita income, their diet is deficient by 25% of the normal requirements. 45% of the families are indebted, the average debt being Rs. 105/-. The total debt according to the enquiry is Rs. 806 crores. The average per capita expenditure of an agricultural labour family is Rs. 107.2 against Rs. 204 of all rural families according to the national sample survey. On an average they are unemployed for nearly 4 months of the year. It will thus be seen that the agricultural labour is one of the most exploited sections of the community and their welfare should demand our attention.

The Kisan Sabha should give attention to their demands and should organise them in separate agricultural labour organisations run on trade union lines. They can be associated with the Kisan Sabha. We should demand fixation of minimum wages, in all States at all levels of operation. I indicate below the position regarding the minimum wages:

I. Whole State.

Orissa	Rajasthan	Panjab
Kerala	Delhi and Tripura	

II. Parts of States.

Assam	Madhya Pradesh	West Bengal
Andhra	Bombay	Himachal Pradesh
Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Mysore

III. Madras Government have not yet fixed minimum wages:

We have to run a campaign to fix up minimum wages in all States universally, and for all agricultural operations.

A question that has to be taken up in this connection is rural unemployment. According to certain calculation, the unemployment in our countryside runs up to the figure of nearly 50 million. Apart from the national wastage involved in this huge unemployment, it involves untold miseries for quite a sizeable proportion of our population.

To tackle this problem, the most important measure is the distribution of waste and fallow lands among the poor peasants and agricultural labour. Today in the country there are about 56.5 million acres of cultivable waste land and another 31.8

million acres of fallow land other than current fallows. The distribution of this vast amount of land among poor peasants and agricultural labour will mitigate the rural unemployment problems and at the same time will increase agricultural production.

As I have stated earlier, last year was a year of great struggles for us. We have to draw important lessons from these struggles. The U. P. Food struggle and West Bengal food struggle showed that the organised kisan masses can force the hands of the Governments to concede certain urgent demands. That these struggles generally served the interests of the whole population including the working class and the city urban middle classes was one of the reasons for the "attracting widespread sympathy and support" in the press and among the political parties, these struggles evoked sympathetic cords and that was one of the factors which led to their success. However in recent years, one of the magnificent struggles was the struggle of the Punjab Peasantry against betterment levy. In this mass movement over 19,000 people were arrested, 8 people were killed in police firings and the panicky Kairon Government unleashed a reign of terror on the rural population. The great struggle showed the potentialities of our women participating in such struggles. The peasant women of Punjab were actually in the forefront defying police repression, goonda menace and congress propaganda. All honour to the brave kisan women of the Punjab! The lesson of Punjab shows the importance of drawing in women into the kisan movement as active participants. We should hereafter pay particular attention to this aspect of our organisation and see that more and more women participate in the activities of kisan sabha.

Now this question of betterment levy and irrigation rates has to be thoroughly gone into. In this connection, we should draw attention to the conclusions of a study undertaken by the National Council of Applied Economic Research on the criteria for fixing up water rates.

"The study points out to the conclusion that the existing system (fixation of water rates) is not based on any scientific principle; **that it is wrong to choose cost of projects as criteria for fixing water rates**, and that the only sound guiding principle which can serve as a basis is a levy based on a percentage of net benefit accruing to the cultivator. The report clearly affirms that once the canal is constructed, the only valid consideration which should weigh with **Government is the full utilisation of the available water over a period of time**. The price of water should then be conducive to the aim of maximising the net benefits accruing to the cultivator from the use of irrigation facilities".

Fixing of water rates should not be on the basis of narrow financial considerations which are a legacy of the British Government in India whose only objective was to collect taxes as much as possible. Today, the wider economic objectives, like the welfare of the people, increase in food production, full utilisation of available water resources etc. should be taken into consideration. To make the peasant alone pay for a number of benefits which accrue to the society as a whole is short-sighted bureaucratic policy. The reports points out the following reasons for not accepting the productivity criterion followed by Government.

1. Some of the objectives of river basin schemes are not revenue oriented; flood control fish preservation, wild-life protection, anti-social erosion etc. are some of the measures which may not directly contribute to revenue but may still be desirable from the point of view of the community.

2. The considerations involved in the selection of a project are those of "cost" and "benefit" to the nation as a whole and have nothing to do with whether or not costs are to be recovered and if so, what the methods of recovery are. For example, the ECAFE "Manual of River Basin Planning" points out: "In the past in the consideration of water development proposals in the far east, great stress has frequently been laid on financial project feasibility and on strictly financial returns. Such a basis does not take account adequately of the full effects of such functions as irrigation, drainage and flood control. Consequently, there is reason to make the standard of economic justification the basic criterion of river basin development rather than financial reimbursement.

Thus an expert study of the question has revealed the defects in the present system of realisation of costs of projects through water rates, betterment levy etc. The Kisan Sabha should therefore demand a revision of the present criteria for selection of irrigation projects, and recovery of their costs. We should support the suggestion made by the study that water rate boards on which all concerned interests like Government, Kisans, etc. are adequately represented should be set up to fix up rates etc.

TASKS AHEAD

The coming year is going to be an year of mounting struggles and we must prepare ourselves for the tasks ahead.

With the formulation of the 3rd Plan fresh ~~tax~~ burdens are likely to be put on the peasantry. We will have to put up consistent and determined struggles to avoid the shifting of the burden of development on the common people. Another task is to campaign for social reforms, against superstitions, and

for education. The caste and communal feelings in the countryside is another obstacle for the unity of the kisan masses. Very often caste feelings stand in the way of the unity of kisans and agricultural labour. All these we have to fight.

We must conduct adult education classes, groups readings should be organised, village libraries and reading rooms should be organised.

We must help the kisan masses in acquiring new techniques, better methods of cultivation, organise co-operative credit societies etc.

If possible model co-operative farms must be organised in suitable areas. Our kisan cadres must themselves know and study better farming techniques, animal husbandry, poultry, etc. They must learn the land legislations existing in each State, help the kisan masses in explaining its provisions and insist on the implementation.

Above all in this year we must conduct a countrywide campaign against eviction, and for distribution of fallow and waste lands. This campaign is of great urgency in view of the national need of higher food production and mitigation of unemployment.

We must warn the State Governments that if they do not distribute waste lands, the poor peasants and agricultural labour will forcibly occupy all available land and start cultivation.

Before concluding my speech, I want to point out to you the latest decision of the National Development Council, taken in its meeting in the first week of April 1959, on Panchayats. which is very important. The Panchayats will be made the agencies for carrying out various development schemes. They will also be called upon to discharge certain customary functions for meeting the needs of rural development. Village Panchayats are going to occupy a very important place in the scheme of administration. The Kisan Sabha must pay utmost importance to the work in the Panchayats and during the next year Kisan Sabha should start big campaigns to democratise the Panchayats and give it more powers.

Comrades, as soon as you reach your provinces call the meetin of Provincial, District, Taluk, functionaries and chalk out a plan for one year. Return from the session with redoubled determination to build the movement and the organisation in a way that we can shoulder the task facing as honourably as it will be possible.