

V. K. Vardan

# ABOLITION OF LANDLORDISM —THE KEY TASK

N. Prasada Rao



ALL-INDIA KISAN SABHA

## TWO ANNAS

---

Printed by D. P. Sinha at New Age Printing Press, Khanna Bldg., Asaf Ali Road, Delhi and published by N. Prasada Rao, AIKS Office, Pawha Mansion, Asaf Ali Road, Delhi.

## ABOLITION OF LANDLORDISM

### —THE KEY TASK

The first and foremost aim of the kisan movement, as laid down in the objectives of the All-India Kisan Sabha, is the abolition of landlordism without compensation and the distribution of land to the peasants and agricultural labourers free of cost. The main task before the 12th Annual Session of the All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) is to concretise this aim and chalk out an appropriate programme for carrying on struggles to achieve it. This article attempts to explain in concrete terms what abolition of landlordism means and how this question has become one of the most pressing and important issues before the country.

The demand is not a new one; it was put forward as long ago as 1946 itself. Previously, the main demand used to be the abolition of the zamindari and other systems of statutory landlordism and big struggles were conducted for achieving it. The demand had become so universal that it became the demand of the national movement itself. The National Congress included it in its Election Manifesto of 1946. Very soon, however, it was found that the abolition of the zamindari and other forms of feudal land ownership would not suffice. Even in ryotwari areas, under so called peasant proprietorship, there had developed an equally predatory and equally retrogressive system of landlordism which, if not abolished, would retard any progressive reorganisation and development of agriculture. Hence, the clarion call to fight for the abolition of landlordism as such was given by the AIKS for the first time in November 1946.

The slogan was given but when it came to concretising it, very sharp differences arose inside the Kisan Sabha on such issues as the maximum limit for landholdings, fair rent, etc. These differences arose, not because of any wrong tendencies or deviations, but precisely because there was no clarity as to what was meant by landlordism and as to how it had become an obstacle to the development of productive forces in agriculture.

## WHAT IS LANDLORDISM?

Whenever the issue of landlordism came up before the Central Kisan Council, one section of the members used to understand landlordism as being synonymous with the zamindari system. They would put forward proposals appropriate and quite correct in that context, but quite wrong and even harmful to the movement in ryotwari areas where conditions were different. It is only now, after the rich experiences gained in struggles during the last four to five years and through understanding the process of accomplishing land reforms in China, that a more or less unified understanding about this problem is emerging.

What is meant by landlordism? Who is a landlord? These are the questions about which there had been confusion so far. It is necessary to attain clarity about this before we discuss the concrete form of abolishing landlordism.

The term landlord should not be confused with the term "landowner". Though the landlord is a landowner, he is also something more. The landlord is a landowner who is not a peasant. He is to be distinguished from a peasant by the fact that he does not work as a peasant works, does not contribute essential manual labour as a peasant does. Like the peasant—a rich peasant—he might employ wage labour, invest capital and receive substantial income from the land. But the essential difference, as has just been stated, between him and the peasant is that whereas the peasant, including the rich peasant, toils on the land, the landlord does not. (About the other type of landlord, the one who simply leases his land and lives on rent, there is no confusion. It is only about the capitalist landlord that this confusion exists and persists.) Unless this subtle and very fundamental distinction is understood, one is apt to confuse the landlord with the peasant, thus losing sight of the basic task of the kisan movement.

Why do we stand for the abolition of landlordism without compensation and for giving land free of cost to the peasants and agricultural labourers?

## MONOPOLY OVER LAND

Land is today monopolised by a few persons who form an insignificant minority of the agricultural population. This can clearly be seen if we examine the statistics relating to land holdings in the various States. As an illustration, I will give an approximate, but detailed, picture of land holdings in Andhra.

In Andhra, landowners form 48% of the rural population. (The figure for those who mainly depend upon incomes from owned land does not, however, exceed 28%.) This means that

52% of the rural population does not own even a bit of land.

Of the rural population 25% are agricultural labourers who neither have any land of their own nor any land on lease. If we add to this the figure of those who, owning small pieces of land, mainly depend on selling their labour-power for a living, the number of agricultural labourers would come to 45% of the rural population.

Even among those who own land, more than 50% are poor peasants whose income from land is insufficient to maintain their farms and their families and who have to work for wages in the fields of the landlords and others for a considerable period in the year. This huge number of poor peasants own about 40,00,000 acres, whereas big landowners, who form about 10% of the landowners own about 1,00,00,000 acres. This means that the land held by 80% of the landowners is less than that owned by the rich 10%.

The following figures taken from the report of the Economic Enquiry (Arogyaswami) Committee appointed by Madras Government, though old, show how great the monopoly of the landlords over the land is in the rich delta districts of Andhra.

#### KRISHNA DISTRICT, WEST AND EAST GODAVARI DISTRICTS

Size of holding	% of landowners of these groups to total landowners			% of total land held by these groups		
	Krishna	West Godavari	East Godavari	Krishna	West Godavari	East Godavari
1 acre and under	23.3	24.3	46.0	1.4	1.3	7.1
1 - 5 acres	39.9	39.1	39.5	13.8	11.4	28.7
5 - 10 "	17.7	15.3	7.6	16.5	13.0	16.4
10 - 15 "	6.7	7.0	2.7	16.4	10.3	10.9
15 - 20 "	4.7	3.5	1.2	10.5	7.1	6.5
	92.3	89.2	97.0	58.6	43.1	69.6
20 - 25 acres	2.4	2.8	0.7	7.0	7.2	5.0
25 - 30 "	1.3	1.5	1.4	4.7	5.2	4.2
30 - 50 "	2.8	3.4	0.6	17.3	15.3	7.1
50 - 80 "	0.7	2.0	0.1	5.3	14.4	3.0
Above 80 acres	0.5	1.0	0.2	7.1	13.9	10.9
	7.7	10.7	3.0	41.4	56.0	30.2

What do these figures show? In the richest districts in Andhra, the best and largest amount of land is monopolised by a small number of landlords. In Krishna District, while 63.2% of landowners, possessing less than 5 acres each, altogether own 15.2% of the total land, 7.7% of the landowners, possessing more than 20 acres each, own 41.4% of the entire land. In the West Godavari and East Godavari Districts, this monopoly over the land is much greater. In West Godavari, the percentage of owners of below 5 acres each is 63.4, but the amount of land owned by them is only 12.7% of the total. Similarly, owners having more than 20 acres each are only 10.7% of the total number of landowners, but they own 56% of the land. In East Godavari, owners with holdings below 5 acres each are 85.5% of the total number of landholders while the land they hold is 35.8% of the total, whereas owners holding more than 20 acres each are only 3%, while they hold 30.2% of the total land!

This shows that in the three richest districts in the whole of the South, 70.7% of landowners, who own less than 5 acres each, possess only 21.2% of the total occupied land, whereas only 7.2% of the landowners, who own 20 acres and above each, possess 42.5% of the entire land!

The situation in other States is more or less the same. There may be slight variations, but the main trend and basic pattern is the same. No detailed statistics of landholdings are available; the figures that are given by several Government reports are scrappy or unsystematic. Accurately to estimate the extent of land monopoly is not feasible.

But still, these figures, collected by various Committees appointed by the State Governments or by sample surveys, show the main trend and features of land holdings. Herewith, I give below the figures of landholdings in various provinces, given by the Planning Commission and by the Research Bureau of the All India Congress Committee. In the absence of any other detailed statistics—just now the Central Statistical Institute, at the behest of the Central Government, is taking a census of landholdings—the figures can be used to understand the main features of landholdings:

# ASSAM

Size of holdings acres	Total land hold- ings in this group	% of total land hold- ings	Land held by this group acres	% of land held by this group to total land
1	2	3	4	5
0 — 5	Not Available	66.1	NA	26.0
5 — 10	"	22.5	"	32.9
Over 10	"	11.4	"	41.1

(From Five Year Plan)

# BIHAR

0 — 5	Not Available	83.3	NA	NA
5 — 10	"	3.4	"	"
10 — 15	"	7.8	"	"
15 — 30	"	2.5	"	"
30 — 50	"	2.0	"	"
Over 50	"	1.0	"	"

(From Five Year Plan)

Income per head of non-cultivating classes	—	Rs. 763-0-0
" " " tenants	—	Rs. 76-0-0
" " cultivating labourers	—	Rs. 66-0-0

# BOMBAY

0 — 5	13,13,000	52.31	36,72,000	14.00
5 — 15	7,07,000	28.18	65,48,000	24.95
15 — 25	2,74,000	10.90	51,63,000	19.68
25 — 100	2,01,000	8.02	81,14,000	30.92
100 — 500	14,000	0.57	23,14,000	8.82
Over 500	563	0.02	4,28,000	1.63
Total	25,10,000	—	2,62,39,000	—

(From Five Year Plan)

33% of land is held by absentee landlords.

10% of landowners own 44% of land.

10,000 big landlords hold 7% of the total land.

Deccan: 40% landholders hold 6.5% of total land

14% landholders hold 50% of total land.

Konkan: 70% landholders hold 15% of total land.

9% landholders hold 58% of total land.

Maharashtra:

72,00,000 are owner cultivators.

17,00,000 are tenants.

16,00,000 are agricultural labourers.

3,00,000 are rent receivers.

(From Land Reforms in India, by H. D. Malaviya)

# MADHYA PRADESH

1	2	3	4	5
0 — 5	12,96,000	51.5	28,56,000	10.0
5 — 10	4,93,000	19.5	35,28,000	12.0
10 — 20	3,75,000	14.8	56,56,000	18.6
20 — 50	2,69,000	10.7	81,53,000	28.9
50 — 100	63,000	2.5	41,10,000	14.0
100 — 500	26,000	0.9	36,80,000	12.9
Over 500	930	0.04	10,27,000	3.6
	25,22,000	—	2,93,50,000	—

(From Five Year Plan)

## BERAR

	acres
Total occupied land	83,14,470
Total cultivated land	65,83,186
Cultivable land	2,00,000

Size of holdings	Number of holdings of this group	% of total holdings	Land held
Below 1 acre	—	3.1	Not Available
1 — 2	—	6.5	"
0 — 10	2,47,020	55.3	"
10 — 30	1,18,535	29.4	"
0 — 30	3,65,554	84.7	"
Over 30	60,290	15.3	"
100 — 500	Not Available	2.53	"
Over 500	683	0.185	About 11,00,000 acres
Total	4,25,844		

That is less than 0.2% of landowners own about 13% of total occupied land!

## MADRAS INCLUDING ANDHRA

Holdings paying land revenue	Number of Pattas	% of total Pattas	Land held by this group	% of total land.
Rs. 10 and less	59,06,000	82.2	1,13,54,000	41.2
Rs. 10 — 30	8,22,000	11.4	75,04,000	27.2
Rs. 30 — 50	2,64,000	3.7	28,26,000	10.2
Rs. 50 — 100	1,37,000	1.9	23,37,000	8.5
(23—45 acres)				
Rs. 100 — 250	46,000	0.6	16,92,000	6.0
(45 to 114 acres)				
Over Rs. 250 i.e. over 45 to 114 acres	14,000	0.2	18,76,000	6.9
	71,89,000	—	2,75,91,000	—

(From Five Year Plan)



Size of holding	No. of Regd. owners	% of total owners	Extent of land owned acres	% of total land	% of wet land to land held
1 acre and less upto					
3 acres	56,10,000	77.9	1,13,80,000	40.7	0.27
3 — 9	11,20,000	15.6	75,00,000	27.2	Not
9 — 12	2,90,000	3.8	28,30,000	10.2	Available
12 — 18	1,40,000	1.9	23,40,000	8.3	"
18 — 50	46,000	0.6	16,90,000	6.2	"
Over 50	14,000	0.2	18,90,000	6.9	"
Total	72,20,000	—	2,76,30,000	—	—

(T. N. C. C. Report. From Land Reforms in India)

#### MYSORE

1	2	3	4	5
1 — 5 acres	8,20,000	66.2	20,61,000	25.3
5 — 10 "	2,65,000	21.2	20,02,000	24.0
10 — 50 "	1,44,000	11.4	28,98,000	35.0
50 — 100 "	11,000	0.9	8,56,000	10.3
100 — 500 "	2,000	0.2	3,79,000	4.6
Over 500 "	100	0.1 (below)	67,000	0.8
Total	12,42,000	—	82,63,000	—

#### DELHI

1 — 5 acres	Not Available	Not	Not Available	Not
10 — 20 "	30,000	Available	10,000	Available
20 — 50 "	1,000	"	45,000	"
50 — 100 "	200	"	17,000	"
Over 100 "	100	"	13,000	"
	31,300	—	85,000	—

(From Five Year Plan)

#### ORISSA

0 — 5 acres	Not	74.2	Not Available	30.1
5 — 10 "	Available	15.3	"	22.0
10 — 20 "	"	7.1	"	20.8
20 — 50 "	"	3.0	"	17.1
50 — 100 "	"	0.3	"	4.1
Over 100 "	"	0.1	"	5.9

PEPSU

1	2	3	4	5
5 — 5	2,39,000	45.6	5,18,000	8.2
5 — 10	13,000	17.6	6,18,000	10.7
10 — 20	1,07,000	20.3	15,72,000	24.8
20 — 50	71,000	13.4	20,72,000	32.6
50 — 100 )				
100 — 500 )	17,000	3.3	2,27,000	3.5
Over 500 )				
Total	5,27,000	—	63,47,000	—

(From Five Year Plan)

PUNJAB

Total No. of land owners	..	25,73,300
Those owning less than 5 acres	..	14,18,221
" 5 to 10 acres	..	5,86,250
" 10 to 20 acres	..	3,07,652
" 20 to 30 acres	..	1,38,663
" 30 to 50 acres	..	78,424
" 50 to 75 acres	..	34,019
" 75 to 100 acres	..	14,270
" 100 to 150 acres	..	6,228
" 150 to 200 acres	..	2,223
" 200 to 250 acres	..	1,232
" More than 250 acres	..	2,002
Land under utilisation of owners	..	94,90,00 acres.
Tenants-at-will	..	1,52,60,000 "
Government tenants	..	32,30,000 "
Occupancy tenants	..	25,40,000 "
Government lessees	..	65,000 "
Total	..	3,11,70,000 "

As per 1948 Assembly statement

63.2% owned less than 5 acres each

83.3% owned less than 10 acres each

90.5% owned less than 15 acres each.

(From Land Reforms in India)

WEST BENGAL

Size of holdings	% of cultivators to total cultivation	
	As per Flood Commission	1951 census
0 — 2 acres	41.9	34.4
2 — 4 acres	20.6	27.6
Over 4 acres	37.5	38.0

(From Five Year Plan)

Total cultivated land is 1,70,00,000 acres

Total cultivable area is 1,28,50,000 acres

18,10,000 families (80,20,000 persons) are owners of land and dependants.  
 6,90,000 families (29,90,000 persons) are bargadars and dependants.  
 7,00,000 families (30,40,000 persons) are agricultural labourers and dependants.)

(From Land Reforms in India)

#### UTTAR PRADESH

1	2	3	4	5
1 — 5 acres	99,71,000	81.2	1,60,24,000	38.8
5 — 10 "	14,56,300	12.7	1,08,24,000	26.1
10 — 16 "	4,40,000	3.6	54,64,000	13.2
16 — 25 "	1,90,000	1.6	36,94,000	9.0
Over 25 "	1,14,000	0.9	53,10,000	12.9
Total	1,22,78,000	—	4,13,16,000	—

(From Five Year Plan)

1 — 6 acres	1,04,55,411	85.4	1,88,40,479	45.6
6 — 18 "	15,56,396	12.7	1,46,22,948	35.3
Over 18 "	2,36,482	1.9	78,53,053	19.1

(From Land Reform in India)

#### T. C. STATE

0 — 5	15,41,000	94.1	13,22,000	Not
5 — 10	56,000	3.4	3,68,000	Available
10 — 15	21,000	1.3	2,53,000	"
15 — 25	11,000	0.7	2,07,000	"
25 — 50	4,000	0.3	1,58,000	"
Over 100	1000	0.1	4,93,000	"
Total	16,36,000	—	29,14,000	

(From Five Year Plan)

Total occupied land	31,03,285	acres
Of which dry land	22,94,966	"
" " wet land	8,08,319	"
Total rural population	77,92,133	

### HIMACHAL PRADESH

	1	2	3	4	5
0 — 5		69,000	95.0	83,000	71.0
5 — 10		2,000	3.0	13,000	11.0
10 — 15		1,000	2.0	12,000	10.0
Over 15		100	0.1	11,000	8.0

(From Five Year Plan)

### COORG

0 — 5	42,000	75.0	1,28,000	30.0
5 — 10	7,000	12.0	54,000	13.0
10 — 15	3,000	5.0	31,000	7.0
15 — 25	2,000	3.0	34,000	8.0
25 — 50	1,000	2.0	31,000	7.0
50 — 100	500	1.0	35,000	8.0
100 — 500	400	1.0	95,000	23.0
Over 500	20	—	15,000	4.0
Total	55,900	—	4,23,000	—

(From Five Year Plan)

These figures do not give a clear picture. In Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal etc. which are predominantly zamindari areas, the figures do not tell us whether they relate to zamindar or tenant or both. Similarly, Madras figures relate to pattas which do not give a scientific picture, as one single landholder can possess dozens of pattas and this is not shown by the figures giving patta holdings. Therefore, these figures show only the general pattern.

Even under the ryotwari system, we find the land monopolised by a small section of the landholders. This section is often called "substantial landowners", "peasant proprietors" etc., which only conceals their class character. For instance, in Bombay, claimed to be a purely ryotwari state, we find 33% of the entire land is held by absentee landlords and that 10% of the landowners monopolise 44% of land. If we examine holdings regionwise, in the Deccan 14% of the landowners own 50% of the total land and in the Konkan, only 9% of the landowners own 58% of the land! In Berar, another ryotwari area, we find that about 15% of the landowners own

about 55% of the land. There are 683 big landlords alone who own about 11,00,000 acres between them!

It is because of this huge concentration of land in the hands of a few landlords that the great majority of the agricultural population goes without land or with meagre bits of land. In the course of history, through feudal, imperialist and capitalist exploitation, these persons have been robbed of their land and turned into tenants and agricultural labourers. Their numbers have been increased by the pauperisation of village artisans, whose crafts and trades were ruined by foreign industrial competition.

This is the crux of the land problem. Unless this land monopoly is broken up, unless the land concentrated in the hands of these few landlords is distributed among the actual cultivators and agricultural labourers, our agrarian economy cannot be reorganised on a rational basis, nor can it be developed with the aid of modern advanced technique.

P. Sundarayya, the founder of the agricultural labour movement in Andhra, made a penetrating survey of landholdings in Andhra and the generalisations he made from his study are as follows:

"From these figures, it can be seen that concentration of land in Andhra is at different levels in different districts.

"In Kurnool District, those who possess less than 10 acres each and are poor peasants also work as wage labourers. Generally, those who own more than 40 acres each cease to do any manual labour and thus turn into landlords.

"In West Godavari, those owning more than 10 acres each do not work and thus become landlords. We can count those with 3 acres and less each as poor peasants. 7% of the land-owners who are landlords possess 70% of the entire land. Poor peasants and agricultural labourers, who constitute about 80% of the population possess only 7% of the land.

"In the fertile dry tracts in Krishna and Guntur Districts, those possessing more than 30 acres each (dry land) generally do not work. The percentage of them is from 3 to 5, but the land they own is about 30 to 60 per cent of the total. Poor peasants and agricultural labourers constitute about 70 to 80 per cent but the land they own is only 5 to 10 per cent.

"On the whole, the poor and middle peasants, together with the agricultural labourers, constitute 90% of the rural

population, but in dry tracts, the land they have is about 30% of the total and in delta tracts (in West Godavari) not more than 15 per cent. Landlords and rich peasants together constitute 10 to 20 per cent of the population, but they possess from 70 to 85 per cent of the land." (From *Janata*, Telugu, Supplement, No. 29.)

These figures show us concretely that the poverty of the huge mass of peasants and agricultural labourers cannot be eradicated and agriculture developed unless and until this land monopoly is broken and land distributed among the poor and land hungry sections of the peasantry.

Hence the basic demand of the kisan movement is to break the land monopoly of the landlords, whether in the zamindari or the ryotwari areas, whether they are rent-appropriating landlords or landlords employing wage-labourers.

### CONGRESS POLICIES

Immediately after the transfer of power in 1947, the All-India Congress Committee appointed an Economic Programme Committee with Jawaharlal Nehru as Chairman. This Committee, in its Report, recommended:

"All intermediaries between the tiller and the State should be eliminated and all middle-men should be replaced by non-profit-making agencies, such as co-operatives.

"Land should be held for use and as a source of employment. The use of lands of those who are either non-cultivating landholders or otherwise unable for any period to exercise the right of cultivating them must come to vest in the village co-operative community, subject to the condition that the original lawful owner or his successor will be allowed to come back to the land for genuine cultivation. In the case of minors and the physically incapacitated, a share of the produce of the land should be given to them.

"The maximum size of the holding should be fixed. The surplus land over such a maximum should be acquired and placed at the disposal of the village co-operatives. Small holdings should be consolidated and steps taken to prevent further fragmentation."

The Jaipur Session of the National Congress generally approved the report and recommendations of the Economic Programme Committee of the AICC. Later, on a request made by the Revenue Ministers' Conference, the Congress

President appointed the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Kumarappa.

The Agrarian Reforms Committee (Kumarappa Committee) submitted its report—a document of great importance. This report has influenced all schemes and reforms subsequently proposed by the Congress as well as the legislative measures adopted by the States. It laid down that there is no place in our agrarian economy for intermediaries and that land must belong to the tiller. Therefore, the Committee recommended prohibiting sub-letting, with certain exceptions. The Committee also “recommended that very large holdings should not continue. A ceiling to land holdings should be fixed and according to our considered views, it should not be more than three times the size of the economic holding. The surplus above the maximum should be acquired by the appropriate authority under the Land Commission on payment of compensation at graduated multiples of the assessment to be determined by an impartial tribunal.” (Emphasis mine—N.P.R.)

Though this report influenced the subsequent policies pursued by Congress Governments, it was never formally accepted by the Congress. Therefore, the demand for a ceiling on land holdings was not to be found in the Congress Election Manifesto of 1952. That Manifesto merely says that the “abolition of Zamindari, Jagirdari and the like must be rapidly completed. Security of tenure and fair rents should be assured to tenants and tillers of the soil. . . . [agricultural labourers] should be given preference in allotment of land in newly reclaimed areas, which should be worked on co-operative lines” and so on.

The Delhi Session of the Congress, which met in October 1951, also merely says “land is the base of India’s economy, the agrarian system should be so organised that the fruits of labour are enjoyed by those who toil and land is worked as a source of wealth for the community.” That these are high-sounding but empty words is proved by the very next sentence: “Some measures of land reform, notably the abolition of Zamindari and Jagirdari system, protection of tenants, regulation of rents, the imposition of ceiling on future acquisition of land and the fixation of minimum wages for agricultural workers have already been given effect to in many states. These should be extended and completed as speedily as possible, so that their full benefit reaches the masses.” (Emphasis mine—N.P.R.)

Thus, before the general elections of 1952, the Congress

never officially accepted the principle of fixing a ceiling on land holdings.

It was only the spectacular gains of the democratic forces in the 1952 general elections, forces that stood for abolition of landlordism and distribution of land gratis to peasants and agricultural labourers, that forced the Congress Governments also to speak of distribution of land and fixing ceilings on holdings. The final Report of the Planning Commission deals with the question and recommends as follows:

"We have considered carefully the implications of the various courses of action which are possible. It appears to us that, in relation to land (as also in other sectors of the economy), individual property in excess of any norm that may be proposed has to be justified in terms of public interest, and not merely on grounds of individual rights or claims. We are, therefore, in favour of the principle that there should be an upper limit to the amount of land that an individual may hold." (*The First Five-Year Plan*, p. 188.)

What is this upper limit? Further on, the Planning Commission says:

"As one method of determining the limit, which may often prove applicable in practical work and is here used by way of illustration, it may be useful to apply a rough and ready criterion such as, for instance, a multiple in terms of what may be regarded as a 'family holding' in any given area. A family holding may be defined briefly as being equivalent, according to the local conditions and under the existing conditions of technique, either to a plough unit or to a work unit for a family of average size working with such assistance as is customary in agricultural operations. Another possible method of indicating a limit may be to propose an average level of money income which the permissible holding may be expected to yield. The limit which may be appropriate has to be determined by each state in the light of its own circumstances but, broadly speaking, following the recommendations of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee, about three times the family holding would appear to be a fair limit for an individual holding." (*Ibid.*, p. 189. Emphasis mine—N.P.R.)

Thus, the basic official plan of the Congress suggests, of course with several limitations and exemptions, a maximum limit to land holdings. The July, 1953, AICC meeting and the May, 1954, Congress Working Committee meeting passed re-



solutions calling upon the Congress Governments to expedite the fixation of ceilings.

So far in no State has this ceiling to land holdings been fixed, but still its acceptance in principle is a big gain for the kisan movement. The Government has had to shift its position several times in the past and has been forced to accept, even unwillingly, many of the demands of the kisan movement. In the case of ceilings to land holdings also, the implementation of the recommendations of the Kumarappa Committee, the Planning Commission, the Congress Working Committee and of the demand of the entire peasant movement can be won by the strength of the peasants in struggle.

Even though the Congress has accepted the principle of ceilings, very powerful forces within that organisation itself and within the Central and State Governments are working against its implementation. The intervention of the Central Ministry of Agriculture is notorious enough. When the State Governments of Delhi and Himachal Pradesh wanted to incorporate provisions for putting ceilings on land holdings in their tenancy bills, the Central authorities objected and stopped it. Here is the comment of H. D. Malaviya, in his book *Land Reforms in India*, an AICC publication:

"The question of fixing a ceiling on existing holdings has been ignored in most of the States. The Part 'C' States of Delhi and Himachal Pradesh, who wanted to do it, had had difficulties in getting their drafts accepted by the Centre. Delhi was asked to drop the idea; so also Himachal Pradesh!"

He goes on to say:

"We have described the provisions regarding ceiling on existing holdings in the original Bill in some detail in order to prove its reasonableness and equity. That is why we cannot understand why the Central authorities recommended the deletion of these clauses from the original Bill. The whole thing becomes still more inexplicable if it is borne in mind that at a certain stage during the discussion between the State and the Centre the latter suggested that the ceiling should not be based on the size of the family but that full ceiling should be given to each co-sharer in the family. The State Government could not obviously accept this as the total amount of the Khudkasht at its disposal could not justify the distribution of full ceiling to each co-sharer." (Pp. 389-90.)

The criticism of S. N. Agarwal, General Secretary of the

Indian National Congress, is much more biting. Here is what he says:

"We are, therefore, sorry to find that the recent Conference of Ministers for Agriculture struck a discordant note and did not create the proper atmosphere for the implementation of land policy as enunciated in the National Plan and the Agra Resolution of the AICC. We are surprised to observe that the Union Minister for Agriculture, Dr. Punjabrao Deshmukh, openly opposed the basic principle of fixing ceilings on existing land holdings and observed that such a policy of interference with rural life would 'recoil upon us'. He, therefore, advocated that the policy of putting a ceiling on present holdings should be 'abandoned'. Instead of impressing on various States the desirability of going ahead with the collection of land data with a view to fix ceilings, he expressed satisfaction at the fact that only two or three states were intending to put a ceiling on land holdings. Dr. P. S. Deshmukh is, of course, entitled to hold his own views in this matter. But these must be regarded as his personal opinions and not the view of the Planning Commission or the Government of India or the Congress. It was, thus, not possible for the Agriculture Ministers' Conference to arrive at any conclusions contrary to the decisions of the Planning Commission and the All-India Congress Committee." (*Economic Review*, October 15, 1953.)

Thus, so far, in no State has the ceiling on land holdings been fixed. This is how the Congress fulfils its pious promises made to the people! Ceilings have been fixed only with regard to future acquisitions and to lands resumed for self-cultivation by the landlords.

But the most dangerous aspect of this form of ceiling is that, instead of restricting landlordism, it gives free scope and legal protection to the large-scale eviction drive the landlords have launched. Under the provisions of the tenancy laws so far passed, the landlords can evict upto the ceiling. Even the protected tenants and occupancy tenants are not exempted. The forces of law and order go to the landlords' aid when the tenants, who are being evicted from lands they have been cultivating for generations, try to resist. Thus, in reality, the putting of a ceiling for land to be resumed by a landlord for his "self-cultivation" is an attack on the tenant and a legal cover for the nefarious activities of the landlords in attempting to evict the tenants and rob them of their lands.

So far, the following ceilings have been fixed on land to be resumed by landlords for "self-cultivation" and for future acquisition:

Province	Future acquisition	Resumption
U.P.	30 acres	8 acres
Punjab	70 standard acres or 60 ordinary acres, whichever is less in the case of holding	30 to 50 standard acres or 100 ordinary acres in the case of displaced persons allotted land
Hyderabad	27 to 40 1/2 acres wet or 108 to 162 acres black or 216 to 324 acres dry	18 to 27 acres wet or 72 to 108 acres black or 44 to 216 acres dry
Rajasthan		500 acres
Madhya Pradesh		50 acres
Assam		400 bighas
T.-C. State	50 to 75 acres	— —
PEPSU		10 to 30 standard acres or 60 ordinary acres
Vindhya Pradesh		250 acres
Himachal Pradesh		5 acres
Delhi	30 acres	— —

It should be noted that in several states, the zamindars, jagirdars, inamdars and other statutory feudal landlords have been allowed to retain and claim as sir, khudkasht, pannai, bakasht etc. as much land as possible. No ceiling has been put on such holdings. In Madras, the zamindar of Challapalli was allowed to retain more than 12,000 acres as kamatam land and the zamindars of Vuyyur, Mirzapur etc. were each allowed to retain thousands of acres (even forest lands) in the name of kamatam. In Rajasthan, the jagirdars are being allowed to keep 500 acres as their khudkasht land, either by evicting the tenants or by the assignment of good, irrigated lands under the Bhakra-Nangal project.

Thus the principle of ceiling in the hands of the Congress is proving not only deceptive but positively harmful to the peasants. Even where an attempt has been made to put ceilings on existing holdings, it has been done in favour of the landlords and not for the benefit of the peasants.

In Bengal, a ceiling has been put on the zamindar's sir land at 25 acres agricultural land plus 20 acres non-agricultural land. This is nothing but making a bhoodan of the peasants' land to the zamindars!

In Hyderabad, the law is that the Government *may* take over land in excess of the permissible limit for *management* by the State. This means that, even if the Government takes over the management of excess land, it simply leases out the land to co-operative societies or agricultural labourers and

so on in order of preference and pays the rents collected to the landlords. This is only a method of making the State the rent collector for the landlords.

### ATTITUDE TO CEILINGS

This is not the ceiling that the peasant movement demands. The ceiling that the peasant movement demands is one that really abolishes landlordism and does away with *land monopoly*. It demands such a ceiling as would leave the largest amount of land possible for distribution among the agricultural and other rural labourers and the land-poor peasants. It demands a ceiling which does not result in eviction of tenants but, on the other hand, which gives all tenants full rights over the lands which they are cultivating. It demands a ceiling which applies not only to future acquisition but to existing holdings.

Thus, in the hands of a democratic government, the ceiling, instead of resulting in the robbing of the peasants of their land, would become an instrument and a method of abolishing landlordism. What should be the ceiling on land holdings? Obviously, a uniform ceiling cannot be fixed for the whole country. Only broad principles can be laid down which will be applicable throughout the country.

The principle followed by the Congress Governments is that as much land as possible should be retained by the landlords. Apart from the fact that the Congress Governments, which represent the interests of the landlords, would never harm their interests, there is also an economic theory behind putting the ceiling quite high and retaining landlordism. The Congress economists argue that big landowners, i.e. landlords, alone can carry on efficient agriculture, since only they have the necessary material resources to carry on large-scale or intensive cultivation. They argue that distribution of small pieces of land among agricultural labourers and poor peasants, who have no capital and other resources for carrying on efficient agriculture, will result in a fall in agricultural production and would only be equalisation at the level of poverty.

This false theory has been debunked by the magnificent land reforms and re-organisation of agricultural economy in People's China. Provided a really democratic government which represents the interests of the common people of the country is in power, we also can emulate China.

The principles in fixing ceilings to land holdings should be as follows:

Firstly, the ceiling should be such that, generally, all holdings of peasants (i.e. those actually performing essential agricultural labour) fall below the maximum limit. To give an illustration: supposing the maximum holding of the peasants is, on the average, 15 acres irrigated land, then the ceiling should be above 15 acres, so that all peasants (rich peasants included) are generally covered by the ceilings and come below its range. There may be extraordinary cases, and in such cases exemptions to this rule may be necessary. For instance, in Travancore-Cochin the land occupied is 30 lakh acres but the rural population is about 77 lakhs. Evidently, a high ceiling cannot be fixed in this State and a different rule has to be followed.

Secondly, the ceiling should not be so high as to leave no land or very little land for distribution. The driving force of the peasant movement is the land hunger of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers. Only a programme which stands for the satisfaction of the demand of this huge mass will make the movement strong.

Thus, the main consideration should be the development of the movement and nothing else. The question should be looked at from the angle of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers and not from that of the landlords. The question is how to get as much land as possible for distribution by breaking the monopoly on land, and not how much land should the landlords be permitted to keep.

The Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee and the Planning Commission recommend three times the family holding or the economic holding. This is not based on scientific principles, nor does it abolish land monopoly. A family holding or economic unit, as defined by the above Committee and Commission, is more or less the average rich peasant holding. A little above that generally falls under the category of the holding of the landlords. Thus, three times the economic or family holding means three times, or at least double, that of the maximum holding of a rich peasant. This clearly leaves large holdings in the hands of landlords, thus continuing land monopoly.

Hyderabad can be taken as an example. There the family holding is defined as 6 to 9 acres wet land, 24 to 36 acres black cotton soil, and 48 to 72 acres dry land. Three times the family holding means (actually the Hyderabad law fixed  $4\frac{1}{2}$  times the family holding!) 18 to 27 acres wet, 72 to 108 acres black cotton, and 144 to 216 acres dry land. These holdings will be more than double the rich peasants' holdings in Telen-

gana. Therefore, if the principle of three times the family holding is accepted, it will result in the perpetuation of land monopoly by landlords and nothing more.

### **WHY ABOLITION OF LANDLORDISM?**

What, in concrete terms, does abolition of landlordism and distribution of land mean to peasants and agricultural labourers? How do they help in developing the productive forces in agriculture?

Firstly, the land held by tenants for a fixed number of years will pass on to them with full ownership rights, without any obligation either to the landlord or to the State. They will be absolved from paying high rents and will have to pay land revenue to the State directly. They become landowners in the full sense of the term.

Secondly, the poor peasants and agricultural labourers and other rural labourers dependent on agriculture will get land. The land each family gets may not be enough to make that family self-sufficient, but it will give security as well as status to them and make them creditworthy.

Thirdly, by the removal of the burden of rent, the amount of agricultural production in terms of its value which used to go into the pockets of the landlords will remain with the actual cultivators. This will greatly increase the purchasing power of the rural masses and result in a great fillip to our industrial growth. It will also provide an incentive to the cultivator to invest capital in land, adopt new techniques and in other ways develop agriculture.

Of course, land distribution is not an end in itself, it is the beginning of the national re-organisation of agriculture. It should be followed by cheap credit facilities, taxation relief, guaranteeing of fair prices for agricultural products and elimination of unequal exchange etc. But land distribution is the most important and basic reform, which should precede any other agrarian reform. Any number of other reforms, without land distribution, will prove futile in solving the present agrarian crisis. Hence, the primary task of the kisan movement is to fight for the abolition of landlordism without compensation and for giving land to the peasants and agricultural labourers free of any cost.

As the Policy Statement of the AIKS, adopted at the Cannanore Session, says:

“Abolition of landlordism and free distribution of land

among landless and poor peasants, has therefore acquired vital national importance. It is only by carrying out such fundamental transformations in land relations that a real basis for planned increase of production for prosperity can be laid. The purchasing power of the people cannot be increased, and the ever expanding internal market, the basis for any real plan, cannot be established so long as the major part of what the peasant produces is squeezed out of him by way of landlords' rents, usurers' interests and Government taxes.

"Abolition of landlordism without compensation will release hundreds of crores of rupees that are now being paid as compensation or as rent to the parasitic class and enable the peasantry and the country to use them in a productive way for the development of agriculture and national industry. The investments that are now proposed to be made under the Five Year Plan can be increased several-fold if only this basic agrarian reform is introduced.

"Abolition of landlordism is of decisive importance in the struggle against famine. For, it is only when the peasants are freed from the enthralling grip of landlordism that their vast potential resources will be released and production increased sufficiently to wipe out the deficit."