

PEASANTS' STRUGGLE

MAY - JUNE 2022





Demonstration of Tamil Nadu Sugarcane Farmers' Association (affiliated to AIKS) in Chennai demanding the repeal of Revenue Allocation Act and announcing of FRP of sugarcane at Rs 4,000 per tonne of produce



A massive rally was organised at Anantapur at the beginning of the 22nd State Conference of Andhra Pradesh Rythu Sangham (affiliated to AIKS)

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FOREWORD

After the victory of the historic farmers' movement, due to which the Modi-led BJP government was forced to withdraw the three anti-farmer, anti-people and pro-corporate Farm laws, it has completely ignored the other pending demands of farmers. The committee to make a law for MSP has not yet come into existence. The government has not spoken a single word on the crucial demand for a legal guarantee to MSP. The labour codes have not been repealed. MGNREGA continues to be starved of funds.

Due to the communal polarisation that it incited, the disunity in the opposition, and the use of massive corporate money power, the BJP was successful in winning four states out of five where state elections were held just after the suspension of the farmers' agitation. This included Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. But in Punjab the BJP was trounced.

The economy of the nation is in doldrums. The retail inflation rate in the month of April 2022 was 7.79 per cent, which is the highest in the last eight years. Inflation in wholesale prices rose to 15.1 per cent, which is the highest in the last nine years. Fuel prices have hit the roof. The number of unemployed youth has crossed all records in the last few years. Inequality in the country has risen sharply, according to a report of the Institute for Competitiveness. The income of the top 1 per cent of Indians has increased by 15 per cent from 2017 to 2020 and for the bottom 10 per cent it has declined by 1 per cent. The wealth of Mukesh Ambani increased from 2018 to 2021 by 350 per cent and is now over Rs 7 lakh crore; while the wealth of Gautam Adani in the same four years increased by 750 per cent and has now crossed Rs 5 lakh crore. And the country is being sold for a song through privatisation of precious national assets to these domestic and foreign corporates.

Today, when the BJP is in power at the Centre and majority of the states and has failed miserably in economic, social and political matters, in order to divert the attention of the people they are creating fabricated communal issues to increase hatred among the people. Almost every state of the country is facing this fire of hatred. Restriction of wearing hijab in educational institutions, hate speeches in the so called 'Dharam Sansads', Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti processions shouting provocative slogans outside mosques, demolishing houses and shops of Muslims who opposed these provocations, attacking historical monuments of the Mughal regime, and once again beginning fratricidal Mandir-Masjid disputes – these are the new weapons used by the RSS-BJP to 'Divide and Rule', just as the hated British rulers did for nearly 200 years of their oppressive reign over India.

On the other hand, it is pro-people governments like the Left Democratic Front government of Kerala that are showing an alternative path before the country in every sphere – be it agriculture, industry, health, education, employment, disaster management, and most important, democratic governance, social justice and communal harmony. This is the path of humanitarian development which must be widely propagated throughout the country.

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VICTORY OF THE KISAN STRUGGLE AND AFTER

- Hannan Mollah

The historic kisan struggle led by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) continued for 380 days and finally forced Narendra Modi to concede one main demand, repeal of three black Farm Acts on 19th November 2021. He did it in his own authoritarian style. As he brought these ordinances without consulting any one, he withdrew them in the same manner, without talking to anybody. After few days of Modi announcing their withdrawal, his cabinet approved it formally. Although Modi said “What was black in those black laws?”, he suddenly found the black when UP elections knocked at his door.

The kisans were happy that their united peaceful longest battle forced the Modi government to accept one of the main the demands. But other important demands were ignored. So the SKM raised the demand of legal guarantee for the price of all crops, MSP as per the recommendation of the Swaminathan Commission. SKM also demanded to withdraw the anti-farmer electricity bill and withdraw the thousands of false cases against kisans in different states, and also to pay financial assistance to the 715 martyrs’ families. SKM also demanded the removal of Ajay Mishra Teni from the central cabinet for his crime against the Lakhimpur Kheri farmers and arrest of his son Ashish Mishra who along with a group of RSS goons, killed four farmers and one journalist by running his cars over them. On government’s silence, SKM wrote to the government reiterating those demands and asked for written agreement from the government, instead of talking to the media by the minister.

Ultimately on 9th December 2021, the



Agriculture Secretary Shri Sanjay Agarwal, wrote to SKM, assuring to implement almost all these demands. But after that, the government remained silent on those demands. The cases were not withdrawn except in Punjab and some in Haryana. The SKM also wrote a letter to the Railway Minister for withdrawal of the fake cases on the farmers by the railways in different states during the struggle. There was no initiative by the central government about giving compensation to the martyrs’ families. Through the media the government said that it would constitute a committee for MSP and for that they wanted names from SKM. But there was no direct communication with SKM. The coordination committee of SKM held several meetings and since more than two month passed and the government was silent, SKM criticised the government inaction and

betrayal and gave a call to observe “Betrayal Day” on 31st January 2022. SKM wrote a letter to the President of India explaining the government’s role and requested him to intervene. The kisans took part in the protests all over the country, but the government did not move.

Hence SKM decided to organise “No Vote to BJP” campaign in the coming assembly elections, especially in Uttar Pradesh. UP committee of SKM met on 1st February 2022 and decided to take this campaign to the grassroot level. SKM leadership addressed press conferences at important district centres of UP to highlight the campaign. We addressed huge press conferences at Moradabad, Noida, Kanpur, Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Gazipur, Banaras, Jhansi, Meerut, Allahabad, Akhbarpur etc and some other centres including Press Club of New Delhi. The campaign had a good impact in the election.

In Punjab there was a problem. A few Punjab Kisan organisations and SKM members went against SKM’s principled stand regarding elections. The SKM decided earlier that kisan organisations were mass organisations of farmers. They were not a political party and were not registered with the election commission. They would organise struggles on kisan issues and fight anti-peasants policies and action of any government. But they would not invite any political party in their struggle led by SKM. No kisan organisation would contest elections in its name and nobody would use SKM name in any election. This was followed in different elections. But in the assembly election of Punjab, some kisan organisations decided to contest elections. They formed new political parties, registered them with the election commission and put up candidates in all assembly seats. One party called Samyukta Samaj Morcha (SSM) was led by Balbir Singh Rajewal and the other called Samyukta

Sagharsh Party (SSP) by Gurnam Singh Chaduni.

In the SKM meeting on 15th January 2022 this issue was discussed and those organisations that had formed a political party were suspended from SKM for their violation of SKM decisions. Many of the Punjab organisations did not join the party and they campaigned against BJP and others. In the elections, the new kisan party lost in all seats, and very few votes were polled in its favour.

As SKM was always for unity in the kisan movement, it declared that if those organisations who had committed a gross mistake accept their fault, dismantle the party and come back to SKM, as kisan organisations they would be welcomed. SKM also assigned some Punjab leaders to negotiate and persuade others to come back. A four member committee was formed for this job. Later on about 16 organisations met and declared they would not keep any relation with those who went against SKM. So the effort for unity was on and if any other joined this group they would be welcomed and approved in the next SKM meeting.

In Punjab the BJP was almost eliminated but in UP, the BJP won with reduced seats and votes. The campaign that the kisan movement had not impacted on UP elections was not true. A large number of kisans voted against BJP. In rural areas, opposition votes increased by 12%, whereas BJP votes increased by 3%. This showed that non kisan votes were more influenced by BJP’s communal politics and voted for the BJP. The main reasons for BJP’s victory were different. Opposition disunity and some opposition parties helped the BJP. The communal factor also worked. So the SKM would continue to organise Kisans of UP against communal and caste division, and forge and strengthen kisan unity on the basis of the struggle on kisan issues.

The central government's budget was placed in parliament SKM criticized the anti-farmer budget and termed it as the revenge of the Modi regime against farmers. The agricultural budget was reduced from last year's budget. There was no mention of MSP. The SKM made serious criticism of the budget and gave a call to protest against it all over the country through a national level press conference at New Delhi and also issued an appeal to the voters of election bound states to vote against the BJP.

In the meantime the Allahabad High Court sanctioned bail to the Lakhimpur Kheri criminal Ashish Mishra. SKM condemned this as collusion between the UP government, administration, investigation agencies and police and government legal teams. SKM arranged for appeal to the Supreme Court against the Allahabad High Court judgement. The families of the victims made the appeal and SKM discussed it with competent lawyers who fought the case in the Supreme Court effectively. Finally the bail of Ashish Mishra was cancelled and he was again sent to jail. The Supreme Court criticized the Yogi government of UP and asked it to give adequate protection to the witnesses. This

was a major victory which encouraged the kisans of the country. As the Lakhimpur Kheri issue was serious, SKM sent a delegation of all its coordination committee members who visited the victims' families, met the administration and submitted demands to the administration on the Lakhimpur problem and held a press conference there. SKM will continue to press this issue.

In the meantime, the tribals of Birbhum District of West Bengal were fighting against corporate capture of their forest land for coal mining, with the help of Mamata Banerjee's TMC government. The SKM opposed this and extended support to tribals and their rights.

During this time to evaluate the present situation and to take decisions on the future course of action, an SKM meeting was convened at Gandhi Peace Foundation on 14th March 2022. There were disruptive disturbances in the meeting. So the SKM had its meeting separately and took some important decisions. To raise the unfulfilled demands forcefully, it was decided to organise protests and campaign against government betrayal and observe MSP guarantee week from 11th to 17th April all over the country.



Along with this campaign the conspiracy in Lakhimpur Kheri would also be highlighted and the non-implementation of commitments given by the minister would be exposed.

On 28th and 29th March 2022 the Central Trade Unions gave a call for two day General Strike. Millions of workers took part in the strike. SKM extended full and active support to the call and farmers joined the strike in different states in large numbers.

In the meantime the Agriculture minister contacted an SKM leader and requested SKM to give two names for the MSP committee. The SKM met and decided to ask the minister for written clarification on it. They must inform about the nature of the committee, its other members, its chairman, term of references, time frame, the action on recommendation etc. The letter was sent and as no reply was received, a reminder was given but till date no response of the government has been received. This showed the anti-farmer intention of the government regarding farmers' demands.

After considering all these matters, the co-ordination committee of SKM decided to hold a SKM meeting to discuss everything including the further course of action. The meeting should be held properly, its attendance should be as per rules and decisions, and it should be properly and democratically held. To ensure this, SKM needs guidelines for its proper functioning, rationalisation of its membership based on proper information, orderly conduct of the meeting, financial discipline and accountability, expansion of the coordination committee etc.

SKM also should make proper planning of the future movement. It is a broad platform and it has been built up on the basis of issue based struggle. On one major issue of repealing the black Farm Acts, SKM achieved

victory. On the basis of this we have to build up the next phase of the movement on MSP. This is the main demand of this time. We should discuss its nature, extent, form and united action. Besides that, issues of taking back the electricity amendment bill, onetime loan waiver, input subsidy, land issues, MNREGA etc. also should be taken in the next phase of the struggle.

The All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) took the initiative to build kisan struggle in the country. It played an important role to build up Bhumi Adhikar Andolan (BAA), All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination (AIKSCC) and later on Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM). It always tried to maintain unity in joint struggles. During the last one decade, AIKS always worked hard to see that these platforms were expanded and strengthened. AIKS at national level and state level should redouble its efforts to strengthen this process. Along with this broad unity, we also should strengthen the unity among the left kisan and agricultural workers organisations, and also with trade unions of the working class.

The country is facing a serious and all round attack from the corporate-communal nexus of the ruling party. They are trying to divide the people and peasantry on communal, caste, linguistic lines. We have to work hard to strengthen the unity of the people to fight against oppression and other economic hardships due to neoliberal policies. We have to defend all democratic secular values to ensure our constitution. We have to fight to defend our diversified culture. We have to oppose the conspiracy of RSS to convert the Republic of India into a Hindu Rashtra. As an important constituent of the democratic movement of our country, the Kisan Sabha has to play its historical role and help to save the country from destruction by the communal forces. □

MANUWADI CORPORATE COMMUNALISM: THE MOST DANGEROUS VIRUS

- Dr Ashok Dhawale

The magnificent year-long struggle of lakhs of farmers around Delhi and across the country, led by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), was victorious when it forced the Modi-led BJP-RSS central government to repeal the three hated Farm Laws in November 2021. It was a historic victory not only of the farmers, but of the people of the country. It was the victory of a remarkably peaceful, democratic and secular struggle against a violent, authoritarian and communal government. 715 farmers were martyred in the course of this struggle. India and the world had never seen such a huge and prolonged farmers' struggle ever before.

These anti-farmer, anti-people and pro-corporate Farm Laws were aimed at eventually undermining the Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime, the 'mandi' system, government procurement of food grains, and thus the entire public distribution system (PDS) itself, which benefits over 81 crore people in India. These Laws would also have ultimately led to dispossession of the peasantry from its land. The Farm Laws were aimed at handing over the entire agricultural sector to the domestic and foreign corporate lobby.

VITAL ISSUES FOR COMING STRUGGLES

While this historic victory of farmers was widely hailed across our country and also in the world, many vital issues of the peasantry and the people still remain untouched. They include:

■ Legal guarantee of MSP and procurement of agricultural produce at one and a half times the comprehensive cost of production

(C2 + 50%), as recommended by the National Commission on Farmers headed by Dr M S Swaminathan;

- Sharp reduction in the cost of inputs like seeds, fertilisers and pesticides in agriculture;
- Immediate removal of the central government surcharge/cess on diesel and petrol, restoring subsidy on cooking gas cylinders, and controlling the massive price rise;
- Withdrawal of the Electricity Amendment Bill which will raise power tariffs across the board not only for farmers, but also for people in both rural and urban areas;
- A one-time loan waiver to the peasantry, four lakh of whom have been forced to commit suicide due to indebtedness in the last 25 years of neo-liberal policies, of whom one lakh have ended their lives in the last eight years of the BJP government alone;
- Doubling of the days of work and wages for agricultural workers under MGNREGA, and the enactment of a new Urban Employment Guarantee Act, in view of the massive rise in unemployment across the country;
- Radical restructuring of the Prime Minister Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), which only helps the corporate insurance companies to the detriment of farmers who are in distress as a result of natural calamities that are increasing due to climate change;
- Expansion of cheap credit, irrigation, power and extension facilities in agriculture;
- Strengthening and expansion of the public

distribution system to make it universal, with the inclusion of 14 essential items;

- Revamping and expanding the public health and educational facilities all over the country in the wake of the Covid pandemic; Withdrawal of the New Education Policy with its three-pronged attack of commercialisation, centralisation and communalisation;
- Radical land reforms and redistribution of land to landless agricultural workers, and poor and marginal peasants; stringent implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA);
- An end to selling off the country for a pittance to the domestic and foreign corporates through the reckless privatisation drive; a repeal of the four anti-worker Labour Codes.

On 28-29 March 2022, the Central Trade Unions (CTUs) gave a call for a two-day nationwide general strike on some of the above issues. It received tremendous response and several crores of workers and

employees struck work across the country. The CTUs had actively supported the year-long farmers' struggle in the true spirit of worker-peasant unity. In return, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) actively supported the two-day workers' general strike, and lakhs of peasants conducted a rural bandh on those days. It must be recalled that the year-long farmers' struggle itself began on 26 November 2020, on the resounding note of worker-peasant unity - with a working class general strike and the peasants' 'Chalo Delhi!' call on the same day.

COMMUNAL AND AUTHORITARIAN DANGER

Politically, the round of state assembly elections in April-May 2021, when the farmers' struggle was in full swing, resulted in the resounding defeat of the BJP in Kerala, Tamilnadu and West Bengal. In Kerala, the LDF won a resounding and record second consecutive victory. The BJP could retain Assam only by the skin of its teeth. Around the same time, the BJP lost in the panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh and in the municipal elections in Punjab. In October 2021, it also



lost in the parliamentary and assembly bye-elections in Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan. That was one of the main reasons why the Modi regime repealed the Farm Laws.

However, the situation changed in the five state assembly elections held in March-April 2022. It was only in Punjab that the BJP was trounced miserably. In the other four states – Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur – the BJP won. This was a result of several factors, the main one being the rabid communal polarisation incited by the BJP. The other reasons were the management of caste groups and alliances, disunity in the opposition, and the use of massive corporate money and media power, as well as the official machinery, by the BJP.

After these victories, the RSS, BJP, VHP and the Sangh Parivar have been viciously pursuing their hardcore Hindutva agenda. After razing the Babri Masjid and beginning construction of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, they have now started raising the issues of the Gyanvapi Masjid at Varanasi and the Shahi Idgah Masjid at Mathura. They have also raised such issues about the Taj Mahal and the Qutub Minar. Throwing to the winds the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991, which prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on 15 August 1947, courts are entertaining pleas to change the status quo of these places. This can only lead to fratricidal strife and communal attacks on a large scale, as happened after the Babri Masjid demolition on 6 December 1992.

The same judiciary that is entertaining such pleas has been silent even at the highest level on long-standing and crucial constitutional petitions against the abrogation of Article 370 and the dismantling of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, against the Citizenship Amendment

Act (CAA), against the draconian clauses in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), and against the corrupt fraud of electoral bonds, which are vitiating the free and fair electoral process.

The Sangh Parivar systematically used the Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti processions in April 2022 to attack the minorities in several states. Bulldozers were used to indiscriminately destroy the homes and shops of the minority community. Their life's savings were destroyed in seconds. Issues like Hijab and Halal were raised to target the minorities. But it is not just the Muslim and Christian minorities who are under attack; Dalits, Adivasis and women are also at the receiving end of these communal proponents of the Manusmriti. All laws giving protection to women against violence are being systematically diluted. The right to freedom of choice is being snatched away and the growth of 'honour killings' is a matter of grave concern.

Along with this is the authoritarian attack of this government against both democracy and federalism. The draconian use of the Sedition Act, National Security Act (NSA) and UAPA on the one hand, and of the CBI, ED, IT and other central agencies against political opponents has crossed all limits. Hundreds of innocent human rights activists, intellectuals, students and journalists have been thrown into jail for years without charge sheets being filed against them, like the Bhima Koregaon detenus and the Delhi riots detenus.

The V-Dem Institute has called India an 'electoral autocracy'. Freedom House has described India as 'partly free'. International IDEA has said that India scores 'at the level of 1975' when a formal Emergency was in place. 'Reporters without Borders' has placed India at number 150 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. States' rights in

the financial sphere and all other spheres are being attacked by the Centre with impunity.

DIRE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

All this is happening when, and precisely because, people are facing dire socio-economic conditions due to the monstrous attacks on their livelihood. It is to divert attention away from their woes that the opium of communalism is being cynically fed to the people by the RSS-BJP.

The number of poor in India (with income of \$2 per day or less in purchasing power parity) has more than doubled from 6 crore to 13.4 crore in just one year due to the pandemic-induced recession. It is estimated that 15 to 19.9 crore additional people have fallen into poverty by the end of 2021. During the pandemic, India accounted for nearly 60 per cent of the global increase in poverty.

The total number of Indians in jobs shrank from 44 crore in 2013 to 38 crore in 2021. However, the working age population grew from 79 crore to 106 crore during the same period. Unable to find jobs, crores of people stopped looking for them and headed back to rural India for survival, which was also hard to come by. Women in the work force had fallen from 36 per cent in 2013 to 18 per cent in 2019 even before the pandemic lockdowns. In February 2021, this figure plummeted to only 9.24 per cent, underlining the dire straits that women were in.

The 2021 Global Hunger Index ranked India at 101 out of 116 countries. Last year the rank was 94. India is now categorised as a country with a 'serious level of hunger'. Yet, even the meagre allocation for the mid-day meal scheme was reduced by a staggering 32.3 per cent between 2014 and 2021, the years of the Modi government. India has 25 percent of the world's malnourished children. 40 crore of eligible people are left out entirely



from the Public Distribution System. The PDS is being wilfully destroyed.

All through the Covid period when people's misery was rising, petrol and diesel prices were hiked almost on a daily basis. The government continuously raised the levels of excise duties, surcharges and cess on petroleum products until both petrol and diesel crossed an unprecedented Rs 100 per litre. The Finance Minister informed Parliament that during the last three years the Centre had through this loot earned a whopping Rs 8.02 lakh crore between 2018 and 2021. Under public pressure, finally, the duties on petrol and diesel were only slightly reduced. However, this will not contain the escalating prices.

Prices of cooking gas cylinders have skyrocketed to over Rs 1000 per cylinder. The central government has stopped subsidising gas cylinders. The much-touted Ujjwala Gas Scheme has disappeared into darkness. Prices of piped gas and CNG have also increased. All these unbearable price hikes of petroleum products have triggered an

inflationary spiral due to rise in transportation and other input costs. Food, vegetables and other essentials saw a massive price hike, scaling a 12 year record. For the poor, even living has now become difficult

BONANZA FOR CORPORATES, LOOT OF THE COUNTRY

Despite the alarming rise in unemployment, growing poverty and sharply widening inequalities, the government's response to the growth slowdown only served to worsen the inequalities in income and wealth. Huge volumes of bad loans taken by large crony corporate groups have been written off and banks recapitalised using tax payers' money. In the last seven years of the Modi government, loans taken by corporates worth Rs. 10.72 lakh crore have been written off. Further, corporates have been favoured with tax concessions of lakhs of crores of rupees.

With receipts from disinvestment (meaning privatization) budgeted at Rs 1,75,000 crore in 2021-22, some of the best profit-making public sector firms and financial institutions have been put up for sale to domestic and foreign corporates. Public sector banks and GIC are to be privatized, along with disinvestment of shares in LIC through the recent IPO. Added to this, the National Monetisation Pipeline proposes to sell off Rs 6 lakh crore of land, railway track, stations, airports, ports, fuel pipelines and other public sector assets to the corporate lobby.

The result of all this has been an engineered transfer of incomes to a few at the top of the pyramid. According to *The Economist*, Mukesh Ambani's net worth increased by 350 per cent between 2016 and 2020; Gautam Adani's net worth increased by 750 per cent during the same period. In 2020-2021 Mukesh Ambani's net worth was Rs.

7.18 lakh crore; Gautam Adani's net worth was Rs 5.06 lakh crore. Other super-rich individuals and families have also seen massive increases in the wealth they hold. According to the *Oxfam India* report 2021, the top ten people in India hold 57 per cent of the country's wealth; share of the bottom half is only 13 per cent.

MASSIVE PEOPLE'S STRUGGLES, CONCERTED POLITICAL-IDEOLOGICAL CAMPAIGNS A MUST

In such a situation, massive struggles of the people on their burning issues, combined with concerted political-ideological campaigns against Manuwadi Corporate Communalism are the need of the times. These must be backed by augmenting our organizational strength manifold.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) is meeting soon to chalk out its strategy for a struggle on the MSP legal guarantee and other important issues of the peasantry.

A joint meeting of the central leadership of CITU, AIKS and AIAWU held in Delhi on 23 May 2022, has decided on a joint campaign and actions to develop a strong countrywide resistance to the neoliberal policies and the communal divisive agenda of the RSS-guided Modi-led BJP government.

A joint campaign will be taken up by the three organisations on the following issues: price rise, employment, health, housing, free education, statutory MSP and assured government procurement, loan waiver, privatisation, labour codes, MNREGA expansion, social justice, upholding people's unity and defeating the poisonous communal divisive forces. The following action plan was agreed upon by the three organisations in the meeting:

An extensive joint fortnight-long countrywide campaign will be launched from



1-14 August 2022 culminating in 'Samuhik Jagaran' on the night of 14 August to mark the completion of 75 years of our country's independence on August 15. The joint campaign will explain the role of the workers, peasants and other toiling people in the struggle for independence and their vision for a democratic, secular and socialist Independent India. It will also expose the servile and disruptive attitude of the RSS and its betrayal of the Independence struggle, along with the current destructive anti-national and anti-people policies of the RSS-BJP-led governments. In sharp contrast, the pro-people alternative placed before the country by the LDF government of Kerala will be popularised far and wide. Joint leaflets, meetings, rallies will be held countrywide.

Massive joint district and local level mobilisations will be held on 9 August 2022 – commemorating 'Quit India Day', as we have been observing during the last several years, highlighting the vital issues mentioned above.

A large joint national convention of the three organisations will be held in Delhi on 5 September 2022, mobilising more than 5000 people in preparation for a huge joint

'Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally' during the budget session of Parliament in 2023. Support will be given to the 1 August 2022 struggle call given by the Agricultural Workers organisations.

Lastly, the 35th National Conference of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) will be held at Trichur in Kerala in December 2022. The 34th Conference was held five years ago at Hisar in Haryana in October 2017. The 35th Conference will be preceded by thousands of AIKS conferences, from the village level to the state level. In all these conferences, special attention must be paid to greater involvement of, and representation to, women and youth; and to streamline, activate and strengthen the organisation at all levels. The membership of the AIKS for 2021-22 will soon be finalised, and it is expected to register a substantial increase over the last few years, in the wake of the historic farmers' struggle.

The coming months must be fully utilised by all of us to strengthen our struggles, our organisation, and our political influence manifold! The battle against Manuwadi Corporate Communalism must be joined in right earnest by every AIKS activist and unit in the country! □

HISTORIC GENERAL STRIKE

- Hemalata

Another Milestone in the Fight to Save the Country from Corporate Communal Policies

The two days' countrywide general strike on March 28-29 this year will be marked as one of the largest general strikes in the history of the working class of our country.

The significance of the strike is that the working class and the toiling people displayed their spirit of fighting amidst a very challenging and difficult situation.

On the one hand the Modi led BJP government is aggressively pursuing its neoliberal agenda ruthlessly attacking all the hard won rights of the people, their livelihoods and living conditions. The four labour codes subsume 29 existing labour laws. Though the three farm laws have been repealed, the Modi government has not taken any measure to fulfil the other assurances given to the Samyukta Kisan Morcha that spearheaded the historic farmers' struggle. Prices are skyrocketing with the government refusing to provide any relief to the common people. Unemployment has reached unprecedented levels. But the government refuses to increase public expenditure on infrastructure development and other measures to generate employment; it refuses to fill up the lakhs of posts that have been lying vacant. Emboldened by the passage of the labour codes meant to weaken the collectively organised interventions and actions by the workers, employers are increasingly resorting to victimisation and vindictive actions against workers asserting their rights, although the labour codes have not yet come into force. Conditions of all sections of toiling people

are deteriorating.

On the other hand, BJP and RSS are utilising every occasion as well as creating occasions to increase communal polarisation. Not only religion, but caste, language etc are also utilised to create animosities and disrupt unity among the people. The hijab row, the Kashmir Files, halal meat, discrimination against Muslim traders near temples, every day, new issues are added to the already existing list of gau raksha, love jihad, etc. These along with the measures to placate the growing discontent through some welfare schemes, to whatever extent they are being implemented, are successfully utilised for electoral gains, as is seen in the victory of the BJP in the recent assembly elections, where it has retained power in all the four states.

The two days countrywide general strike was announced in the national convention in November 2021 when the farmers struggle was continuing and thousands of farmers were on the streets at the Delhi borders. The farmers' struggle ended on a victorious note with Modi, till then considered invincible, compelled to announce the repeal of the three farm laws and apologising on the floor of parliament, of course, not for enacting them in the first place, but for his inability to convince a section of farmers on the benefits of the farm laws. This has created lot of enthusiasm and confidence among all sections of toiling people and progressive sections in the society, including the workers.



But the re-election of BJP in four states in the recently concluded assembly elections, except in Punjab, has to some extent dampened that enthusiasm. In some people, including some sections of the trade union movement, the results have led to a sense of dejection and loss of initiative. In addition, questions were raised about the response of the workers and their readiness to join the strike, given the impact of the Covid pandemic and the associated lockdowns, closures, restrictions and the resultant loss of jobs and incomes and the immense hardships that the workers had to face. This too added to the challenges before the joint trade union movement in ensuring the success of the strike.

But the working class and the toiling people of our country have effectively rebuffed these doubts and vacillations. They have proved their determination and ability to unitedly face these challenges and sent a strong message to the Modi government that they were not going to take the corporate communal attacks on the people and the nation as a whole, lying down.

The response of the workers, peasants, agricultural workers and all sections of

common people to the strike which was called with the slogan 'Save the People, Save the Nation', was magnificent. The participation of workers surpassed that in the earlier strike on November 26, 2020, showing the anger of the working class and the people against the attacks on their livelihood, living conditions etc but also on the BJP government's policies of handing over of the country's precious infrastructure developed through public resources and the hard work of our workers, to the big corporates, domestic as well as foreign. Huge processions and demonstrations marked the strike in the entire country.

The strike received wide coverage in the international media. The *desi godi* media too could not avoid acknowledging it. As per the initial reports, the strike was successful in several strategic sectors of the economy.

It was unprecedented in PowerGrid, where workers in around 45-50 per cent of total substations in the country went on strike. Workers in hydel power projects in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Assam were on strike.

Strike was highly successful in the petroleum sector. In the northeast region, all the oil terminals and LPG bottling plants were closed due to heavy picketing at the entry gates. More workers participated in the picketing on the second day of the strike. The participation of contract workers in the refinery segment was 100 per cent. In marketing, both permanent and contract workers participated totally in the strike. In Cochin refinery, workers participated totally in the strike despite the High Court ban. 25 unions in the oil sector, 13 of contract workers and 12 of permanent workers served strike notice.

Port workers in Tuticorin VOC port, Paradip port and Mangalore port were on total strike. Five striking workers of Tuticorin port heroically prevented the management from engaging the CISF personnel to unberth a ship carrying windmill blades by jumping into the sea and blocking the ship from sailing, resorting to 'ship roko'. Both permanent and contract workers in Bhavnagar and Kakinada ports also joined the strike.

Road transport was badly affected across the country. In addition to Kerala, strike was 100 per cent in the road transport sector in Haryana, 100 per cent among Punjab workers in Punjab and 100 per cent among the dumper drivers of Paradip port. In Tamil Nadu around 1.10 lakh workers in the government owned public transport joined the strike; around 350 bus depots were flooded with idle buses; strike was 91 per cent after a long gap of ten years. In Jammu and Kashmir, state road transport buses were totally off the road. Strike in the road transport sector in several other states including Telangana, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand etc was highly effective. This, along with the closure of mandis and markets has resulted in a bandh like

situation in several states including Tripura, West Bengal, Assam, and in several districts in many other states. In many states auto rickshaws and private passenger and goods transport vehicles were off the road.

Strike evoked good response among employees in the electricity sector. It was 100 per cent in KSEB in Kerala; in Tamil Nadu around 52 per cent electricity board employees joined the strike. Electricity employees in several other states including Haryana joined the strike.

Strike was total in insurance and massive in banks across the country. Branches of commercial banks including public sector, private sector and foreign banks and cooperative banks, were closed. It was successful in the regional rural banks as well. Strike in SBI was partial.

Strike among the central government employees was highly successful on both the days. More than 80 per cent of postal employees, 90 per cent of income tax employees, over 50 per cent of employees in audit and around 60 per cent in other departments participated in the strike. The participation on the second day was more with young employees taking the initiative for the strike against NPS.

Strike among state government employees was successful in Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Chandigarh, Haryana, Jharkhand, Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Tripura while in several other states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Himachal Pradesh a section of state government employees joined the strike. State government employees in Jammu and Kashmir held demonstrations.

The strike in BSNL was better than last time. It was near total in Kerala, West Bengal,

Assam and in the north eastern states. It was total in Leh and Kargil in Jammu and Kashmir circle. More than 50 per cent employees joined the strike in Maharashtra. Strike was observed in many other circles but it was poor in Gujarat and eastern UP.

Strike was effective in the plantation sector; it was total in Kerala, over 60 per cent of workers on an average and 75 per cent workers in the state owned rubber plantations joined the strike. In West Bengal more than 3.5 lakh tea garden workers in Doars and Terai regions went on strike and joined rail and road roko programmes after taking out huge processions. Tea garden workers in Assam and Tripura also joined the strike in large numbers.

Strike in the private industrial sector was successful in several states. Workers in major industries including MNCs like Bosch, Volvo, Toshiba, Sandvik, Mahindra and Mahindra, Tenneco (Escorts), JK Tyres, ABin Bev, Federal Mugul, L&M Cloth, Ceat etc in Karnataka, Telangana, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu struck work. The workers also participated in huge demonstrations. Strike was 100 per cent in Ashok Leyland, Ennore Foundries, Madras Rubber Factory, Balmer Lawrie, Tablets India, JK Tyres, Apollo Tyres, Filter Cat etc in Tamil Nadu. It was successful in many other big private sector industries in the state.

100 per cent workers in the engineering industry participated in Howrah in West Bengal. 24 out of the 52 jute mills in North 24 Paraganas, Howrah and Hoogly in the state were completely closed; in others strike was more than 70 per cent.

Lakhs of workers in the industrial clusters in several states including Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, NCR Delhi, Himachal

Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab, etc joined the strike.

Strike in cement industry was 70-80 per cent in most of the states. It was observed by the workers of Ultratech cement, Bela cement, Jaypee cement, KJS cement, Bagheri cement, Birla White, Kharia, Ambuja cement etc in different states including Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal etc.

Strike was 50-100 per cent in around 40 spinning mills in Tamil Nadu. In Telangana around one lakh power loom workers in seven districts participated in the strike. Around 40 per cent of power loom workers in Kolhapur, Solapur, Bhiwandi joined the strike.

Medical and sales representatives across the country joined the strike on both the days in an unprecedented manner. More than 1.5 lakh sales representatives in 389 major cities and towns, besides smaller towns, were involved in the strike resulting in total cessation of sales promotion activities. They also joined the picketing at 2,100 points and demonstrations in many states.

Traditional sector workers in cashew, coir in Kerala participated in the strike en masse.

Around 80 lakh scheme workers, particularly anganwadi employees, ASHAs, midday meal workers joined the strike as well as the demonstrations, picketing etc all over the country.

Municipal workers in hundreds of municipalities in the country, safai karmacharis, grameen chowkidars, etc in most of the states joined the strike.

More than 10 lakh construction workers in more than 17 states participated in the

strike on both the days. Participation of unorganised sector workers particularly head load workers, beedi workers, shop employees, tailoring workers, domestic workers, participated in the strike. The unorganised sector workers not only participated in the strike but also in the demonstrations, rallies, dharnas, rail and road blockades that were held in tens of thousands of places across the country.

In several states, massive mobilisations were held at the district level on the first day and at the lower, block, panchayat level on the second day. Significantly the strike and its demands were taken up to the panchayat level this time through such mobilisations. For example, in Karnataka, demonstrations were held in 625 panchayats in addition to more than 200 other centres in 31 districts. Similar programmes were held in several other states.

The participation of the working class in Kerala was historic. Massive mobilisations were made with minute planning before the strike. The workers of BPCL unit in Cochin and BEML Palakkad participated in the strike totally ignoring the court order banning the strike. Similarly, the state government employees and officers participated in the

strike on both the days. On the second day they participated with renewed vigour despite the High Court order banning strike by state government employees. In addition to massive demonstrations, strike centres were opened at 1040 places which functioned day and night during the strike days, organising cultural programmes also.

This strike also witnessed solidarity actions from larger sections of people and organisations.

Defence employees, who did not join the strike due to the Defence Essential Services Act, held massive demonstrations in front of central government offices and ordnance factories. In Kerala, they joined the strike without serving strike notice.

The recognised federations of railway employees, the All India Guards Council etc called for solidarity actions in support of the two days' strike though their observation was restricted to some zones. Railway employees in some zones like south eastern zone and eastern zone etc joined motor cycle rallies as part of the strike campaign. The All India Loco Running Staff Association observed solidarity actions in Southern Railways, South Central Railways, East Coast Railway and Metro Railway. Solidarity badges were worn on duty by loco running



staff in Southern Railways. Demonstrations were held in Kerala and some places in Tamil Nadu and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.

Railway contract workers held demonstrations in several states. In Central Railway, demonstrations were held independently by railway contract workers in Solapur, Ahmadnagar, Manmad, Nasik railway depot etc; they also joined the joint demonstrations. In Andhra Pradesh, demonstrations were held in Vijayawada, and a human chain was also formed. Big demonstration was held in Puri in Odisha. In Bihar, the Rail Neer workers shut the plant and joined the strike on both days. In Tamil Nadu railway contract workers in Integrated Coach Factory, wore badges and participated in the demonstrations held by DREU. In Uttar Pradesh, the station cleaning staff conducted meetings in three locations. In Kerala and West Bengal too railway contract workers joined the demonstrations held by the trade unions, in large numbers.

The role of IT employees in this general strike was remarkable. Under the banner of their respective unions, IT employees in West Bengal, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, NCR Delhi and other places extensively campaigned about the strike and the issues that it raised, not only through social media but also physically participating in various activities, including wall writing, demonstrations etc.

The solidarity extended by the peasant and agricultural workers' organisations is particularly noteworthy. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha, whose leaders participated in the national convention of workers, extended support to the two days' strike, reiterated their support after the dates of the strike were changed. The constituents of SKM actively participated in the strike.

The SKM congratulated the working class for the success of the strike and reiterated its support to the workers' struggle against the imposition of labour codes and resolved to continue the struggle against anti-farmer policies of the government. It has signalled its willingness to continue efforts for unity of workers and farmers that has been developing through synchronised and coordinated actions in addition to solidarity actions during the last around two years. This is a positive development.

The two days' general strike received support and solidarity not only from the people of our country. It received huge attention internationally and huge solidarity from the international working class movement. Several trade unions including the World Federation of Trade Unions and others expressed their solidarity. Indian seafarers stationed in various countries across the continents and oceans at present have expressed their solidarity.

In several states, the state and district level leadership of AIKS and AIAWU coordinated with the CITU and planned joint actions on the strike days. Peasants and agricultural workers joined the demonstrations, rail and road blockades in almost all the states. This solidarity and support among the class organisations has to be further strengthened in the coming days. Members of AIDWA, DYFI and SFI also participated in the mobilisations on the two days in several states.

The strike received tremendous support from the common people across the country. The overwhelming support to the two days' general strike shows that people of our country are determined to save the country from the clutches of the corporate communal government and its devastating and destructive neoliberal agenda. □

LEFT ALTERNATIVE GENERATES HOPE FOR KERALA'S FARMERS AND AGRICULTURE

- Akhil KM and Vijoo Krishnan

The general refrain in India for the last three decades has been that agriculture is no longer a viable proposition for the peasantry. The onset of the neoliberal economic policies saw the gradual withdrawal of the State from public investment in agriculture and rural development. Deregulation of input prices and removal of price controls coupled with cut in subsidies also led to incessant increase in their prices at the behest of agribusinesses driven only by the motive of profit maximisation. Financial liberalisation saw a shrinking access to credit at affordable interest rates for farmers. Trade liberalisation and removal of import duties and tariffs as well as quantitative restrictions led to dumping of cheap agricultural produce and resultant price crashes. Volatility of world market prices also saw the burden of price crashes falling on farmers, even as corporate companies saw a never ending flow of profits. This scenario led to a situation where farmers were pushed into indebtedness and lakhs of farmers in distress were forced to commit suicide. This was the scenario even in Kerala when the Left Democratic Front Government took over in 2006.

Kerala is a rare case where commercial crops like spices, cashew, coconut, arecanut, cocoa, tea, coffee and rubber accounts for more than 80 percent of the cropped area. Paddy is the other major crop in the State but it depends on other States for a major share of its requirements. The districts of Wayanad, Idukki and others had witnessed many suicides as a Free Trade Agreement with Sri Lanka saw cheap imports of tea, coffee and spices leading simultaneously to a price crash

for farmers in Kerala. The issue-based united struggles built by the Kerala Karshaka Sangham (AIKS) that rallied around all organisations of the peasantry rightly articulated the demand of debt relief and setting up of a Debt Relief Commission.

The LDF Government led by Com.V.S.Achuthanandan that took over in 2006 sought to overcome the agrarian crisis with a three-pronged strategy for agriculture. The strategy aimed to provide urgent relief to farmers in debt, to stabilize agricultural prices, and to raise agricultural productivity and incomes. It set up the Debt Relief Commission and also came up with different subsidies for farmers. The Debt Relief Commission waived loans of farmers and rescued them from the debt trap. The peasants' movement also articulated the need to organise the peasantry into collectives for intervening in production- optimising the use of inputs, reducing costs of production, and enhancing productivity as well as for intervention in processing, value addition and marketing to ensure that farm produce gets remunerative prices and also a share of the surplus generated accrues to the farmers. Many initiatives were taken during the three LDF Governments that came to power in 2006, 2016 and 2021 in this direction. The interventions made ensured that the farmers could be extricated from the bleak scenario they had been pushed into. The hotbeds of farm suicides started seeing smiles returning to the farmers' faces.

Making Agriculture Viable and Remunerative

A major issue that has led to falling

agricultural incomes is the fact that the costs of production are increasing with incessant rise in prices of inputs and farm produce is not getting a remunerative price, thereby rendering agriculture unviable. How to make agriculture a viable proposition? This is a matter that the different Left Democratic Front Governments have placed on a high priority. Reducing production costs by providing subsidised inputs, increasing productivity with high yielding varieties, ensuring procurement at remunerative prices and ploughing a share of surplus generated through processing, value-addition and marketing such that farmers will be assured of at least 50 percent more than the cost of production following the Swaminathan Commission recommendations alone can ensure better incomes for farmers.

Rice is the staple food of Keralites; but Kerala had to depend on other States to meet its requirements as it was faced with a deficit in the context of vanishing paddy lands as well as shrinking area under cultivation. In 2006, the LDF Government gave a big incentive bonus as the MSP announced by the Union Government would not ensure profitability for a Kerala farmer given high costs of cultivation and low yields. Even as the centrally fixed MSP of paddy was Rs.570/Quintal, the LDF Government procured at Rs.707/Quintal in 2006 and by 2011 it increased to Rs.1,400/Quintal while the centrally fixed MSP was only Rs.1000/Qtl. The MSP for paddy for the 2020-21 crop year announced by the Centre was Rs 1868/Quintal. While in Kerala, paddy was procured at as high as Rs.2800/Quintal. Following the trend set in 2006 a focus was given to promote Paddy cultivation. In the latest Budget it has been increased to Rs.2820/quintal while the centrally fixed MSP is merely Rs.1940/quintal. In addition in 2020 a royalty of Rs.2000/hectare was announced for paddy cultivators to recognise the



contributions being made by the paddy fields in the conservation of ecosystems, which in the latest Budget has been increased to Rs.3000/hectare. In 2008 Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act was passed to protect paddy fields from conversion for other purposes. Special incentives for promotion of paddy cultivation encouraging use of fallow land, allowing lease to the women's Self Help Groups, Kudumbasree and so on were given. In 2021-22 Budget an outlay of Rs.116.14 crores has been set aside for paddy development. An amount of Rs.3 crore is earmarked for cultivation of paddy in the fallow lands under Subhiksha Keralam. Rice fallows will be brought under sustainable cultivation with the active involvement and convergence of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS), Kudumbasree, PACS, FPOs and the LSGD institutions. About 3.42 lakh women farmers organised under Kudumbasree 74,640 Joint Liability Groups have been given lease to cultivate land and they brought 33,259 hectares under cultivation of paddy as well as vegetables. As a result of these policies, paddy

cultivation in the State has increased from 1.7 lakh hectares to 2.3 lakh hectares.

In line with this 'farmer-centric' approach the subsidies extended by the State Government and through the Gram Panchayats to farmers are unparalleled in India. In 2020 the subsidies were revised as farming expenses including for inputs like seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, planting material as well as labour and irrigation have risen sharply. The subsidies for some of the crops (per hectare) are as follows: paddy (one harvest a year) – Rs,22,000/-, vegetables – Rs,25,000/- cool season vegetables – Rs.30,000/- , pulses- Rs.20,000/- tapioca and other tubers- Rs.30,000/- and banana – Rs.30.000/-. There are also incentives for conversion of fallow land to paddy cultivation, For instance, the Karivellur-Peralam Gram Panchayat gives a subsidy of Rs.17,000/ hectare. Every Panchayat has similar schemes and different subsidies to help farmers. In the latest Budget 76 crore was allotted to the development of paddy cultivation in the State. A project was launched to provide loans up to 50 lakh for buying agricultural equipment and machinery to groups. For intervention in vegetable cultivation 39 crore was allotted this year when 19 crore was allotted last time. In comparison with 2015-16, Vegetable production in Kerala increased from 6.5 lakh metric tonnes to 12.12 lakh metric tonnes in 2018-19, which later increased to 15 lakh in 2020 and farming was extended to 24,000 hectares, recording an increase of 3.5 lakh tonnes of vegetables during the period of last LDF government. The Government distributed 78 lakh vegetable seed kits and 248 lakh plants free of cost and gave other support like rain shelters and drip irrigation facilities. A big chunk of the vegetables produced was pesticide free with organisations like the Kisan Sabha playing a big role in their cultivation. The last LDF government announced base price for 16 vegetables and fruits. This

initiative was the first of its kind in the country. The base price has been fixed by calculating the production cost plus 20% on the basis of a study conducted by the State Agricultural Prices Board. The base prices per kilogram have been fixed as follows - Tapioca Rs 12, Banana Rs 24-30, Pineapple Rs15, ash gourd Rs 9, cucumber Rs8, bitter gourd Rs 30, snake gourd Rs 30, string beans Rs 34, tomato Rs 8, ladies finger Rs 20, cabbage Rs 11, carrot Rs 21, potato Rs 20, beans Rs 28, beetroot Rs 21 and garlic Rs 139. In future more crops will be added to the list.

Notably, when the COVID Pandemic led to acute distress for the peasantry and the Narendra Modi led BJP Government maintained an insensitive indifference to their plight, while giving huge concessions for their corporate cronies, the LDF Government made a clear statement of where their priority lies. A Project named Subhiksha Keralam was announced in 2020-21 and Rs.3,600 crores to strengthen agriculture, food security and cooperatives for processing value addition and marketing. It aims to combat food scarcity and the Kerala State Agriculture Department has started converting fallow lands into farms; about 25,000 hectares is targeted for this. The primary task of the project is to ensure self-sufficiency of the state in food production which is implemented through collaborating with various government departments and also ensuring people's participation. Subsidies and assistance are being provided to promote cultivation particularly in barren land. Kerala already has a network of Cooperative Banks across the State with the Left playing an active role in its organisation. The setting up of the Kerala Bank or Kerala Cooperative Bank by amalgamating 13 District Cooperative Banks expectedly is also giving much needed help to the peasantry. Recently it has extended a loan of Rs.51 crores to poultry farmers to assist them to set up 2000 poultry farms with up to

Rs1.5 lakh being given without any collateral and with an interest rate of 4 percent. Kisan Sabha has also taken initiative to set up Cooperatives for processing, value addition and marketing. Even as Free Trade Agreements mentioned earlier as well as India-ASEAN FTA has led to price crash of commercial crops, the LDF Government has taken steps to protect farmers, stabilise prices and ensure better prices. A new Company called Kerala Agro Business Company is imagined for the production of value added agricultural products and an initial amount of 100 crores was allotted towards the capital investment of the Company. 10 food parks were also envisioned in the Budget by allocating Rs.100 crores along with the project to encourage multi-crop cultivation farms. For protection of rubber farmers Rs.500 crores was set aside in the latest Budget.

Kerala has been a pioneer in ensuring social security for the masses. It has earlier set up a Kerala Agricultural Workers' Welfare Fund and aiming to ensure welfare of farmers engaged in agriculture and allied sectors also formed The Farmers' Welfare Fund Board or Kerala Karshaka Kshemanidhi Board. Pension and financial support will be extended to the farmers also. As of now the pension given is Rs.1600/month and the LDF envisages to increase it to at least Rs.2,500/month.

The total agricultural land in Kerala amounts to around 25.69 hectares. In which the food crop cultivation amounts to 11.03 percent. The different steps taken will help enhance the area under food crop cultivation. Kerala has a daily need of 87 lakh litres of milk per day. More than 95 percent of the requirement is produced in Kerala itself. MILMA, the production cooperative in the State has about 10 lakh dairy farmers organised in about 3,400 milk cooperatives. Depending upon the quality farmers are

getting Rs.35/- to Rs.42/- per litre of milk with different incentives like providing concentrated cattle-feed which is costing Rs.1345/50Kg bag at a subsidised price of Rs.400/50Kg bag, cattle-feed supplements like mineral mixture, Vitamin A as well as green grass/fodder. The Government also intervened in ensuring vaccination and insurance for cattle. The crop insurance scheme which was in operation since 1995 covering 25 major crops grown was restructured in 2016-17 by enhancing the compensation for crop loss. The Crop Insurance Fund is operated with contributions from the participating farmers by way of registration fee and premium and Government contribution. In addition to the existing crops, minor fruits apiculture and floriculture will also be included under the scheme. An amount of Rs.20 crores is earmarked for the scheme during 2021-22. The Kerala government is also planning to extensively promote urban farming in Kerala. "Harita Nagari" [Green City] Project was implemented in the cities.

In 2021 agriculture and allied sectors in Kerala registered a growth of 9.44 an increase from 8.38 in 2020. The LDF Government envisions an increase in expenditure in the Agricultural sector. Even as the BJP Government is withdrawing from investment in agriculture, Kerala has chosen a different path proclaiming that it is firmly with farmers and agricultural workers. It passed a resolution against the 3 Anti-Farmer Acts brought by the BJP Government and is seeking to strengthen processing, value-addition, marketing, in the Public sector as well as through cooperatives. These set of policies have led to a transformation in the State and from a bleak past of agrarian distress and suicides. The Left Alternative has generated hope for farmers and agriculture in Kerala. A new confidence has been generated and important lessons can be learnt by other States. □

WITH MODI GOVT. POLICIES, FLOUR PRICES RISING, WHEAT SHORTAGE LOOMING

- Savera

While Prime Minister Modi was, as usual, busy inaugurating projects in poll-bound Gujarat and visiting Europe, retail prices of another essential food item, wheat flour or atta have reached their highest level. According to data collected from across the country by the central government's department of consumer affairs, average atta prices have increased from Rs 28.80 per kilogram in May 2021 to Rs 32.91 in May 2022. That's a 14 per cent increase in one year, the biggest increase since such retail data became available from 2010.

Atta is a staple of a very large number of families, especially in the north and central India. The rise in its prices will severely damage the family budgets of the poor. Unlike pulses or specific seasonal vegetables, a family cannot replace or stop using wheat till its prices cool down. This means that there is no escaping the damage such an

onerous price rise is causing.

Coupled with the ongoing price rise in some other essential commodities, especially cooking oils, distress due to price rise is rapidly reaching unbearable scales.

Milk is selling at above Rs 50 per litre. Most widely used cooking oils are selling at nearly Rs 200 per litre. And some of the vegetables are going through a seasonal spike that takes them out of the common citizen's reach. For example, potatoes are selling at over Rs 22 per kilogram, up by 26 per cent over the same time last year, and tomato prices have more than doubled to reach Rs 38.26 per kilogram.

The story of this robbery is not yet complete. Cooking gas prices – which can be directly controlled by the central government – have increased by an incredible Rs 431.50 in just one year for the



domestic 14.2 kg cylinder. That's an increase of 76 per cent. Meanwhile, the commercial cylinder of 19 kg now comes for Rs 2,397, up by 126 per cent from its price of Rs 1,059.50 last year.

Meanwhile, petrol and diesel prices continue to be jacked up by the central government. Recall that the Modi government kept the prices frozen for 137 days before the Assembly elections in UP, Punjab and other states. No sooner were these elections over, than the prices were raised successively for several days. In the past year, petrol prices have gone up by over 20 per cent and diesel prices by nearly 17 per cent, according to daily data released by the Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC) of the petroleum and natural gas ministry. The rise in the prices of these fuels has a cascading effect on all essential commodities since it hikes up transportation costs.

WHEAT AVAILABILITY AND PRICES ARE GOING TO WORSEN

The wheat situation is worrying because there is a looming crisis of availability – and the Modi government is blissfully unaware, or maybe it doesn't care.

Projected wheat output has been downgraded from the estimated 111.32 million tonnes to 105 million tonnes in the 2021-22 crop year. This was announced in a press conference by the union food secretary on May 4. Last year, India produced 109.59 million tonnes of wheat. It is for the first time since 2014-15 that wheat output is expected to decline. This means that there will be a nearly 6 per cent dip in wheat output this year compared to the estimated target and a 4 per cent shortfall compared to last year. These are estimates as of end-April, the actual position may be worse.

The reason for this dip in wheat production is the extreme heat witnessed in north India in March-April which caused wheat grains in the standing crop to shrivel up and fail to reach the requisite weight. In itself, this is not too much of a cause for worry as long as the dip remains in this order. But there is more bad news.

The procurement of wheat by government agencies, which continues till June, has sharply declined in the ongoing rabi marketing season. According to media reports based on food ministry sources, it is now being estimated that wheat procurement will fall to a low of 19.5 million tonnes this year. This is a steep drop of about 55 per cent compared to last year when 43.3 million tonnes were procured. It is one of the lowest wheat procurements in recent memory, taking the level down to what it used to be in the early 2000s.

WHY THIS SHOCKING REDUCTION IN GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT?

Reasons given by the government include lucrative export prices leading private traders to buy up wheat from farmers, holding back wheat harvest by farmers in hope of better prices and, of course, the dip in output itself.

The effect of low procurement will be that cheap wheat will no longer be available in the Public Distribution System (PDS) for needy families. Already, this effect is visible in wheat allocation for the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana under which 5-kilogram free food grain is distributed to all needy families. The government has ordered that 5.5 million tonnes of rice should replace wheat in this scheme. Although it is being described as a measure to push fortified rice, it appears to be an attempt to compensate for the wheat procurement shortfall.

According to the food and public distribution department's monthly food grain bulletin, wheat stocks in the central pool were 18.99 million tonnes in April this year, over 8.3 million tonnes or 30 per cent less than last year. As the low procurement continues, government-held food stocks will further decline. The level is still above the mandated buffer stock norms but the situation is not healthy.

DANGEROUS COMPLACENCY

The real problem lies with the way the Modi government is looking at this situation. Remember that it has not distinguished itself whenever there is a crisis. Nor does it prepare well in advance. In the last few years, the repeated shortages of coal for power plants, the terrible oxygen shortage in 2021 during the Delta wave of Covid, the fertiliser shortage during November-December 2021, and the ongoing cooking oil short supply due to falling in palm oil imports are all crises in which the Modi government's negligence or mismanagement were starkly visible. It looks like the same kind of complacency is marking the wheat prices and availability situation.

Immediately after his return from the European tour, prime minister Modi held a meeting with top officials of concerned ministries on May 5 to review the wheat supply, stocks and export situation. He "directed that all steps be taken to ensure quality norms and standards so that India evolves into an assured source of food grain and other agricultural products" according to a press release of the prime minister's office.

The prime minister's advice to bureaucrats to ensure that quality norms should be adhered to shows that at the very top levels, there is more concern about the

export market than internal availability. The tenor of officialdom is that there is nothing to worry about. They feel that farmers are getting prices more than MSP, the shortfall in output is very small, and despite the big drop in procurement, the stock position is still comfortable. All this is indicative of a bizarre and irresponsible complacency that India can ill afford to have.

In the coming months, this shortage of wheat could affect the public distribution system seriously. It could also affect the prices of wheat in the open market as India is still encouraging exports and about 10 million tonnes have been already exported. It is reported that 40 million tonnes of wheat are targeted to be exported. Only recently has the government announced a stop to export of wheat.

If the export market falters, the held over wheat brought at higher prices by traders (as claimed by the government) will be routed back to the domestic open market – at higher prices. People already deprived of wheat in their ration quotas will be forced to buy up the high priced wheat from open markets.

Farmers also could get affected if the volatile export market does not materialise fully. Government procurement will close in June and subsequently, they will have to sell the wheat at whatever price they get from avaricious traders.

In short, the immediate future portends all kinds of pitfalls and dangers. With the Modi government displaying its usual attitude of brazening it out in situations of crisis, the time could be ripe for another – and more – a devastating blow to the already distressed living standards of the people. □

ON CROP WISE MOBILISATION OF FARMERS IN THE DAIRY SECTOR

- P Krishnaprasad



The first-ever all India dairy farmers' workshop jointly organised by All India Kisan Sabha and P Sundarayya Memorial Trust was held at Kozhikode, Kerala, on May 14-15, 2022. It was attended by 71 delegates from 17 states. Ashok Dhawale, president of AIKS, inaugurated the workshop, while AIKS joint secretary, Vijoo Krishnan chaired the inaugural session. Reception committee chairman and secretary of CPI(M) Kozhikode district, P Mohanan Master and state secretary of Kerala Karshaka Sangham Panoli Valsan also spoke.

The different sessions were addressed by Sudheer Babu, Dinesh Abrol, Vijaymba R Inderjit Singh, Ajit Nawale, Ranjini Basu and Nidheesh Johny Villatt. Delegates from across the country participated.

The various papers presented in this workshop deals with the details of the dairy

sector in India and helps to develop a concrete understanding of the degree of exploitation taking place in this sector and explores possible policy alternative. A visit to Kozhikode dairy under MILMA was arranged, and interaction with K S Mani, chairman of Malabar union of MILMA, and the leading officials and workers was beneficial.

Dairy is the largest single crop in India that provides considerable income presently to around eight crore households. Women's workforce constitutes 70 per cent of the labour in livestock farming. The dairy sector plays a vital role across the country regarding rural livelihood, with India being the largest milk-producing country in the world for the last 22 years.

As per National Account Statistics 2019, the value of the output of milk in 2017- 18

is Rs 7,01,530 crore (at current prices), surpassing the total value of output from the top two food grains – Rs 2,72,221 crore (paddy) and Rs 1,73,984 crore (wheat). India's agricultural and allied sector's output value is estimated at around Rs 28 lakh crore, implying that milk's contributions are more than 25 per cent of the total output value.

The pandemic saw an unprecedented crisis in the dairy sector, and it severely affected small and marginal farmers with a clear gender and caste angle. Women and farmers belonging to the lowest social strata with minimum social support mechanisms were the worst hit. For instance, before the lockdown, dairy farmers in Maharashtra used to get Rs 35 for a litre of milk. At the height of the pandemic, this dropped to a meagre amount of Rs 18. It is estimated that the average cost of production of a litre of milk in Maharashtra was Rs 29. This grim situation forced farmers in Maharashtra to go for a movement demanding procurement and MSP in the dairy sector. AIKS, as the leading organised movement of the peasantry in the state, was very active in this movement.

According to reports received by the AIKS centre, states like UP and MP also witnessed crises like Maharashtra. Both states reported procurement prices below Rs 20. Interestingly, private dairies dominate in all these three states. The crisis also shed light on the shallow claims of the neoliberal regime that a deregulated dairy sector will nourish small and marginal farmers. A closer look into the situation would tell us that neoliberal policies were killing the dairy farmers in myriad ways, and the lockdown accelerated it.

The Kerala dairy cooperative, MILMA gives Rs 38 per litre, while in other parts of

the country, the price is in the range of Rs 17 to Rs 35 for cow milk. For MILMA, such a price is possible since 83 per cent of the income generated from milk sales is earmarked for the milk producers. On the other hand, the majority of farmers are not getting the cost of production and have to even bear losses.

The large-scale entry of private dairy corporate companies and the import of foreign dairy products threaten the existence of dairy cooperatives. Many foreign companies have merged with Indian dairy companies and dominate the market today. Dairy cooperatives cannot compete with the foreign corporate companies enjoying a heavy subsidy from their governments. The union government must withdraw from its plan to open the Indian market by permitting free trade on milk and milk-based products under the pressure of imperialist forces.

The Modi regime's policy formulations have been favouring private production. This was clear when the NDA government approved the setting up of the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF), worth Rs 15,000 crore. This is significant because in the history of independent India, "the first time the government has announced a special fund for the private sector in expanding dairy and processing infrastructure in the country," a FICCI report said. It is pointed out that "AHIDF would facilitate incentivise investments in the establishment of infrastructure for dairy and meat processing and value addition infrastructure and establishment of animal feed plants in the private sector." The increasing clout and monopoly of big capital in the dairy sector – which is always willing to collaborate with foreign capital—at the cost of cooperatives

can adversely affect the livelihood of farmers, as we have seen in Maharashtra during the lockdown.

To counter the juggernaut of finance-driven corporate capital in dairy, AIKS believes that possibilities of producer cooperatives in financing, production and marketing shall be explored. By working on the inadequacies of existing dairy cooperatives, we propose to develop a model where industrial surplus be shared with the primary producers. Traditional and successful cooperatives like Amul—which controls 45 per cent of the total procurement of milk by all cooperatives—fail to share the industrial surplus with the primary producers. By procuring milk at reasonable prices and providing essential veterinary and fodder support, traditional cooperatives ensure a procurement system for small and middle farmers. Amul or state monopoly companies like Mother Dairy in the dairy sector, by their ingrained

character, cannot avail credit from the farmer/worker producer, in the form of their crop and impart a share of the surplus value generated in the process of production, both in the primary stage of quality addition and the higher stages of food processing with the aid of advanced technology. This is because their structure is not designed to take crops in credit and consider primary producers as stakeholders in the total production. They are designed to work as companies with the apparel of cooperatives.

The AIKS 34th conference report in 2017 held at Hisar says, “The crop-wise mobilisation is crucial as far as to prepare the peasantry to gather collective strength and tactically advance towards modernisation of agriculture production by converting petty production into large scale production without which the petty producers cannot sustain and overcome the corporate exploitation and the resultant



pauperisation. Crop wise mobilisation and advancing towards the establishment of agro-processing industries for both inputs and outputs and marketing facilities under the collective ownership of peasant social cooperatives are essential tasks ahead of the peasantry. This helps to take advantage of the scale of production by facilitating input supply, collective cultivation, procurement, storage and wear housing, processing, value addition, marketing, surplus sharing and research and development.”

In such a context, it is very important for AIKS to organise a crop-wise/sector-wise resistance. Based on the programmatic understanding of the AIKS, we should struggle for a new and restructured regime of producing cooperatives owned and run by producer classes, well-knit in consortiums that suit their producing and marketing needs. Consortiums are important for enhancing industrial capacity, which will enable the producer cooperatives to go for advanced value addition and explore all possibilities of building national level consortiums of cooperatives. Experiments done by the Brahmagiri social cooperative project —a government of Kerala initiative actively supported by AIKS— in Wayanad to alter production relations can be a model and possibilities elsewhere.

The workshop also strongly condemned the communal mindset of RSS-BJP, which, through various state governments, banned the cattle trade (which provides 27 per cent of rural household income) and demanded that they immediately open the cattle trade markets or let the respective state governments pay the market price for cattle and procure and rear them in the cow shelters.

The workshop has insisted the union government ensure fair and remunerative prices for all the dairy farmers. The union government shall enact a law to ensure sharing of an industrial surplus of value-added milk products by the cooperatives and the corporate companies with the milk producers as additional price as per the ratio of the milk procured from them.

The model implemented by the LDF government of Kerala through the Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme (AUEGS) releases Rs 32,400 per year - 100 days of wage to all the dairy farmers in the urban region who own a minimum of two milk animals and give milk to the cooperative society helps to reduce the cost of production. The workshop demanded the union government extend this provision across the country by amending Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. That will bring significant development in the dairy sector and milk production in India and enhance the livelihood security of people in rural areas.

The workshop decided upon an organising committee with P Krishnaprasad, Ajit Nawale, V S Padmakumar and Mohammed Ali as coordinators and representatives from all states and representatives of the dairy cooperatives.

A similar workshop at the state level will be conducted in July-August 2022. The formation of an all India dairy farmers’ federation will take forward the struggles in this sector for interventions to improve dairy cooperatives and protect the interest of farmers. A memorandum and charter of demands will be submitted to the union minister in charge of dairy. On November 26, 2022, the birth anniversary of Verghese Kurien will be commemorated and observed as a dairy farmers’ day. □

ALL INDIA CONVENTION OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS CALLS FOR UNITED STRUGGLE

- Vikram Singh

All India convention of agricultural workers concluded successfully at Harkishan Singh Surjeet Bhawan, New Delhi. The convention was attended by more than 500 delegates from different states. Convention adopted charter of Demands and gave a call to organise protest in 500 districts on 1st August 2022 followed by the one day rural strike, date will be decided later.

The convention was inaugurated by P Sainath, a renowned journalist Ramon Magsaysay awardee and founder of the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI). While inaugurating the convention, he explained the state of inequality in our society which is a result of the neo-liberal economic policies. Presently inequality in Indian society is more acute than the peak time of British rule in India. During 1991 when these policies were introduced in India, our country did not have a single dollar billionaire in India but presently according to the Forbes report India has 166 dollar billionaires. Total assets of these 166 persons are 794 billion dollars. This number was 53 in the year 2012, the year when socio

economic caste census was conducted in India. According to this census the leading bread earners of two third of rural households were having income less than Rs 5000 and the income of 90% households were less than Rs 10000. Out of the remaining 10% most of the household were those who had a government job at that time, which is probably by now snatched due to these policies.

He explained how the policies of the Government helped corporates to make huge profits during Covid-19 times. It was the health sector from which emerged 24 dollar billionaires in India during the pandemic and the second more profitable sector was online education. He reminded the delegates that we fought the freedom struggle to fight against this inequality.

Agricultural workers, the wage labour force in Indian agriculture is among the most marginalized sections of the population. They are missing from the entire policy process reflected by the lack of a separate legislature for agricultural workers. The crisis ridden



agriculture has further devastating impact on their lives primarily due increased unemployment in rural India and secondarily by rise in population of landless agricultural workers. There is a decrease of 9 million cultivators while the number of agriculture workers increased by 30 million between 2001-2011. The increase in the number of agricultural workers over the cultivator's means, the dependence on wage labour is more than that on land. With the mechanisation of agriculture and indiscriminate use of labour displacing technology, working days in agriculture have been further reduced. Agricultural workers are getting only 38 to 52 days of work in the year from over 100 days in 1990.

Agricultural workers are not getting enough work to support their families, hence are forced to seek alternate work in villages or migrate to other places. The agricultural workers' earnings are going down due to the reduction in days of work and stagnant wages. Recently there have been incidents in Northern India when certain panchayats have issued dictates of fixed rates of cultivation of paddy without any discussion with workers which reminds us about the old days. The minimum wages for agriculture are not revised timely, normally are inadequate and there is no mechanism even to ensure implementation of announced rates. Agricultural workers are still waiting for their share of land in absence of land reforms except some states. Presently the agenda of land reforms is completely missing. Instead the reversal of land reforms is happening and small and marginal farmers are losing their land due to the policies of the state. Millions of people are homeless even after 75 years of independence.

The BJP led Central Government has further pressed on the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies which have

already adversely impacted the lives and livelihood of the working class during the last 30 years. Currently, the web of social welfare schemes as an integral part of the welfare state is weakening with the conscious implementation of anti-people and pro-corporate policies of the Central and most State Governments. This is further worsening the living conditions of the rural and urban masses. Despite all its limitations in implementation MNREGA has proved its utility in rural India in a serious period of economic and agrarian distress including the covid-19 period. Though the political will for its complete implementation was always lacking, the BJP led Central Government is working to weaken it

We are witnessing an increase in the caste atrocities and strengthening of caste identity in the last few years of BJP rule. The increase in atrocities against marginalized sections of society, gang rapes and mob lynching are integrally linked to the BJP project of marginalization of Dalits and oppressed sections under the crisis-ridden neoliberal order. The Constitutional rights of the Dalits are being violated both by the State and Central Government

The pursuit of neoliberal policies and Hindutva agenda by the BJP led Central Government is making lives of agricultural workers and rural poor difficult. This can be fought by the united struggles but masses are being divided on various identity lines by the same forces which are ruling our country. Keeping in this view the organisations working among agricultural workers evolved a unity through united actions on the basis of common issues of workers. This convention further strengthened this unity.

VS Nirmal introduced the concept of convention and Dhirender Jha welcomed all the delegates. Vikram Singh placed the draft

resolution in the convention. GS Goriya supported the resolution which was discussed by more than 18 comrades from different states. After detailed discussion, the resolution was unanimously adopted by the convention along with a charter of demands. The convention was jointly presided over by B. Venkat, Durga swami, D.S. Kasyap, Devi Kumari, Radha Devi, Sri Ram Chaudhary, and Gaurav Kumar.

Convention adopted the following Charter of Demands:

1. We demand 200 days work at Rs.600/- under MGNREGA Ensure job security of Mates and technical staff working under MGNREGA. Ensure timely payments of wages. Expand it to the urban areas.
2. Provide pension of Rs. 5000 per month for all agricultural and other rural workers after the age of 55 years.
3. Ensure homestead land, Pacca house with toilets and kitchen gardens, cattle shed and ensuring dignified shelter for all homeless and landless households. Increase the existing grant of construction to 5 lakhs.
4. The Central Government should take bold initiative to implement radical land reforms so that a land base is created for landless agricultural and rural labour households. On the eve of 75 years of Independence, the realization of land to tillers as committed during the National Movement be ensured. The declared surplus land and Government waste land must be distributed to landless dalits, agricultural workers, tribal people and poor peasants with the provision of financial assistance and right of possession.
5. Implement the Land Acquisition Act, 2013 with specific provisions of compensation and alternate land for SCs/STs. No eviction and displacement, without rehabilitation. Ensuring proper housing, health and educational facilities at rehabilitation sites.
6. Full implementation of the Forest Rights Act Livelihood of all forest dwellers to be protected. Social forestry be promoted by Central and State governments for creating employment generation and for protecting the environment Recruitment of agricultural and rural workers be prioritized in this sector.
7. We demand strengthening of Public Distribution System. It should include complete food package such as pulses, oils, spices and vegetables.
8. Stop Atrocities against Dalits. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989) be strengthened and its implementation be ensured. Withdraw Section 41 A of the section which allows the bail of accused at police station. Stringent action be taken against culprits booked in cases of attacks on Dalits.
9. The SC/ST sub plan be implemented in the Central and state budget Violations in its implementation be treated as an economic criminal offence.
10. Enact reservation in private sector and clearing of backlog in recruitment under reserved category.
11. Revise minimum wage of agricultural workers and link it to inflation rate. Ensure equal wages and fixation of agricultural wage in alignment with the latest pay commission report. Wages should be revised every two years.
12. Central Government must enact legislation for protection for migrant workers for their security dignity, livelihood and other welfare.
13. Abolish Child Labour. Free education of

- equitable quality from pre-school to university level to be provided for all. Ensure scholarships and proper hostel facilities for the needy.
14. Strengthening of rural health sub centres at panchayat level and upgradation of Primary Health Centres, which are equipped to handle critical health care and epidemics. Provide free vaccination against Covid for all.
 15. New Labour Codes and Electricity Amendment Act, 2020 be immediately scrapped.
 16. Ensure MSP for all farmers. Protection of share croppers against eviction by the landlords. Compulsory registration for all share croppers and framing of Special Share Croppers Protection Act. Benefit of all the schemes of Government for agriculture should reach to sharecroppers/tenant farmers.
 17. Stop privatization and commercialization of education, health services and PSUs.
 18. Vigilante Gaurakshak and so-called village development committees groups must be banned. Private militias that are defying the law of the land with impunity and promoting communal disharmony and violence be treated as a criminal act.
 19. Manual Scavenging be completely eliminated and secure alternate jobs be provided to those forced into it. Recruitment of sanitation workers at Panchayat and ward levels. We demand a salary of at least Rs.21000 and ensuring social dignity.
 20. Incentives should be provided to promote inter-caste marriage. Inter-faith couples to be protected and the one month notice in the Special Marriage Act be scrapped to ensure that couples marrying under it are not harassed.
 21. Declaration of employment schemes and an employment policy for women agricultural and rural works in light of their specific problems.
 22. Ensure registration of all unorganized workers on e-Shram portal without any charge and conditions of documents. Help desks should be organized in the villages by ensuring recruitment of educated rural youth from labour households for the help desks.
 23. An effective regulation of toxic pesticides with the provisions for protective measures and adequate compensation in case of health injury to agricultural workers.
 24. Safe drinking water in the bastis of agricultural workers and other rural households. Free electricity supply to agricultural workers households.
 25. Write off loans as relief to agricultural workers and landless rural household. Provide bank credit cards and easy loans without any security by cooperative societies and banks at low interest rates to agricultural workers. Loans of self-help groups should be waived off and women be given loans without interest. RBI should bring guidelines to control the microfinance companies to stop the loot of rural masses.
 26. Ensure corruption free implementation of all poverty alleviation and rural development programmes.
 27. Set up Agricultural and Other Rural Workers Welfare Board in all states. The Government policy should not be to promote labour displacing technology in agriculture.
 28. Dilution of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) is a violation of tribal rights and ecology of the area. The dilution must be stopped.

CHANGES IN THE RULES OF BHAKRA BEAS MANAGEMENT BOARD

A WELL-PLANNED CONSPIRACY OF PRIVATIZATION

- Manoj Kumar

The Union Ministry of Power issued a notification on 23 February 2022 and implemented the Bhakra Beas Management Board (Amendment) Rules 2022, which will replace the Bhakra Beas Management Board Rules 1974, under which the appointments of two board members now can be filled by the officials of any state. They were earlier mandatory from Punjab (Power) and Haryana (Irrigation). Now is not necessary that the candidate should be from Punjab or Haryana. Soon after this decision, Samyukta Kisan Morcha, All India Kisan Sabha, other farmer organizations and opposition parties started opposing this move of the central government. SKM Punjab and Haryana jointly hold a rally at Mohalli and submitted a memorandum to concern authorities. This opposition is necessary, if we want to continue the benefits of these projects for the nearby states. The main reason for opposing this decision is the intention of the central government behind it, which can be gauged from previous experiences. The farmers have apprehension of attack on the rights of the states and the possibility of privatization in this decision.

Importance of Bhakra Beas Management Board for Punjab and Haryana

Bhakra-Nangal Dam Project and Beas Projects come under the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB), out of which the Bhakra-Nangal Dam on the Sutlej river was the biggest water project in the country after independence, which was completed in 1963. Speaking about this project, the country's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru called it "the new temple of resurgent India". This dam was

the visualisation of Sir Chotu Ram, Kisan leader of Joint Punjab before independence. Even today, the 'Gobind Sagar Lake' built by this dam is the third largest lake among the lakes built by the dams of the country. In Beas Project Unit-I, part of Beas river water is connected with Sutlej river by tunnels and open canal. The water of Beas River is diverted to Gobind Sagar lake and a dam has been constructed at Dehra. Under the Beas Project Unit-2, the Ponga Dam was built on the Beas River, which was commissioned in 1961 and completed in 1974.

On 1st November 1966, the state of Punjab was reorganized and the state of Haryana came into existence. After this the Bhakra Management Board was formed for the Bhakra Nangal project. After the completion of the Beas project, the Beas Construction Board (BCB) was transferred by the Government of India to the Bhakra Beas Management Board. After this the Bhakra Management Board was renamed as the Bhakra Beas Management Board with effect from 15th May 1976. Presently, the total installed capacity of power generation from all the projects of BBMB is 2918.73 MW – the third largest installed hydroelectric capacity in India. In terms of irrigation, the immense water reservoir under this is used to supply water to 135 lakh acres of agricultural land in three states of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. But out of this Punjab and Haryana have a large share respectively. The projects under this board have played an important role, first in the Green Revolution and later in the white revolution (milk production) in the



Punjab-Haryana region. The water provided by the canals of these projects helped a lot in increasing the production of agriculture in this area, and the electricity generated from these projects also met the energy needs of the region. Due to this it was possible to increase the production in agriculture and animal husbandry and also boost the development and economic activities of the entire area.

Attack on the Idea of Indian Federalism

The Bhakra Management Board was formed on 1 October 1967 under section 79 of the Punjab Reorganization Act for the administration, maintenance and operation of the Bhakra Nangal Project at the time of the reorganization of the state of Punjab on 1 November 1966. After this, when the Beas project was under completion, under section 80 of the Punjab Reorganization Act the Beas Construction Board was transferred to the 'Bhakra Beas Management Board' on 15 May 1976. The work of regulating water and electricity generated from projects in states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and Chandigarh is done by this board. For the smooth running of these projects and the functioning of the Board, the

provision was kept in the Bhakra Beas Management Board Rules 1974 for giving representation to both the major states (Punjab and Haryana) in this board. Under this, a rule was formulated to keep one member from Punjab (electricity) and one member from Haryana (irrigation). The intention behind giving these states representatives in the board was to give participation to both the states in its management, so that our federal structure would be strengthened further.

Water, irrigation, canal, water storage etc. have been kept under Entry 17 of State List in our Constitution's Seventh Schedule and Union List Entry 56 deals with the regulation and development of inter-state rivers and river basins. The understanding behind this was to give the state control over water and the intervention of the centre in a disputed area, so that the state governments could use the water resources according to their own requirement and liberty to carry forward the development of the state and any kind of issue regarding the sharing of water among the states could be avoided. At the time of the

reorganization of the state of Punjab, in the light of this understanding, a rule was made to keep members from Punjab and Haryana in the BBMB.

But as the present BJP government at the Centre is doing in other matters, by eliminating the rights and powers of the states and concentrating entire authority in their own hands, similar has been done in this case as well. This is an attack on the federal structure of country. The encroachment by the central government not only attacks the independent functioning of the state governments of non-BJP parties, but it is also an attack on our democracy and constitutional values, under which the idea of everyone's participation in the state and administration has been given importance. But the government, which gave the slogan of 'Sab Ka Saath Sab Ka Vikas' (every one's support, everyone's development) is only going on the path of 'own control and development of its political intentions'. With the states directly involved in these projects, the people who understand the needs of the states must be in it. Then they can move forward for inclusive development, and resources will be utilized to their full potential and everyone will be benefited. The partnership will also strengthen mutual trust.

Privatization of Water

Today, if we talk about giving water to private hands, then most of the people will dismiss it as an exaggeration, because most of the steps taken in this direction are not known to the general public. Whereas the reality is that urban water distribution, dams and other projects have been handed over to the private sector. Even some rivers have been sold.

The privatization of water started in India with neo-liberalism in 1991, under pressure from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund to implement it. In 2002, the National Water Policy was implemented by the Central Government in which it was stated that the private sector should be encouraged in the planning, development and management of water resources. Today it has been proved in various researches around the world that the privatization model of the World Bank has failed. Still, our government is engaged in taking it forward. Today many water projects in India are under private companies. These private companies are working in the areas of water supply to homes, water energy, canal irrigation, water distribution for industries etc. In the year 1998 in united Madhya Pradesh (currently Chhattisgarh), 23 km of the Shivenath River was handed over to a company named Radius Water Limited for 22 years for the distribution of water to the industrial area. This move was strongly opposed by all environmentalists and social workers. The present government also instead of revoking this contract extended this contract in 2020. Water, which is one of the basic elements necessary for life, its private ownership can prove most destructive for our society. It is a national resource on which only the people of the country have a right. Its use for maximising private profits is completely immoral and a betrayal of the people of the country.

Obviously, tinkering with a system in which there is participation of the beneficiary states and none of the parties has any problem with it, raises serious doubts about the intention. The Narendra Modi-led central government has been continuously trying to centralize powers by reducing the powers of the states. Along with it privatization has also been promoted under different names. In this situation, in spite of protests, the government has been arbitrarily making changes in the existing system which increases the doubts arising in the perceptions of the people. □

COMRADE MALLU SWARAJYAM: A LIFE OF STRUGGLES

- S Veeraiah

A red star rose to the sky in the evening on March 19, leaving behind a legacy of revolution, comradeship and fearlessness. Communist stalwart and the legendary leader of the Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle, Comrade Mallu Swarajyam breathed her last at the age of 91 in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. She drew courage from her mother and jumped into the battlefield of the Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle along with her brother, when she was only 11-years old. She drew inspiration from Maxim Gorky's magnum opus 'Mother' and carried the red flag on her shoulders for eight decades with unflinching commitment.

Comrade Swarajyam, a name that is well known to Telugu people, was a leader of the masses and dedicated her life to the Indian Communist movement. She upheld the values of a true communist and withstood the challenging times of globalisation and peaking consumerism, and her life stands as an inspiration to future generations. She made a special mark for herself with her dedication to the Red Flag and the zealous spirit she brought to every people's movement.

A powerful orator whose words hit the ruling class just as hard and on point as the bullets she fired during the armed peasant movement, Comrade Swarajyam could also move the people's hearts and rally them to fight for their rights. Be it the struggle for land, liquor ban or women's emancipation, she inspired people to action and stood as a living example of the values she preached.



Even when bedridden, she preferred to stay in the AIDWA office and spent her last days with the women activists. Despite having a loving and caring family, she chose to be with the community and as her final contribution to society, she willed that her body be donated to medical college for the benefit of future doctors and medical research.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the role of Comrade Swarajyam's mother, Chokkamma was critical in shaping her personality as a people's leader. Even though born into a family of landlords,

inspired by the rising Indian independence movement in the 1930s, Chokkamma named her daughter 'Swarajyam', meaning independence. Chokkamma's close relatives were influenced by the Andhra Maha Sabha, and she encouraged her children to join the freedom struggle along with her nephews. Chokkamma's two other daughters and sons-in-law were also supporters of the movement. Even though she never directly took part in the freedom struggle, she encouraged her children to fight for the country and its people. She imbibed humanist values in her children and did not subscribe to the traditions of oppression and discrimination practised by landlords of that age. After her husband's death, she extended her full support to her children in their revolutionary endeavours and to fight the very class she was born into.

Growing up with the humanist values imbibed from her mother, Comrade Swarajyam mingled with the poor and opposed regressive feudal traditions such as child marriages and caste discrimination from a young age. She openly carried water to the fields along with the agriculture labourers and participated in anti-caste community lunches. She broke the shackles of tradition and created history by encouraging dalits (they used to be called Harijans then) to play 'Batukamma', a traditional floral dance of Telangana.

Comrade Swarajyam took up arms for the first time to liberate the workers of Telangana from bonded labour. The movement intensified with the resistance of a washerwoman Ayilamma who, in 1946, defied her landlord to farm her land. Ayilamma's resistance inspired many, and it grew into a struggle of tenant farmers against the zamindari system. With the

heroic death of the armed struggle leader Doddi Komarayya in the Kadivendi demonstration of July 4 in the same year, the anti-zamindar sentiment grew stronger. It was at this period that the Communist Party, on July 11, gave a call for an armed peasants' struggle.

Upon the call given by the Communist Party, Comrade Swarajyam joined the struggle and moved among the people with various aliases to escape the police and organised the movement. She moved among the tribals as Sammakka and gained fame as Rajakka, and led a squad of women revolutionaries called the 'Rajakka Dalam'.

Dropped out of school at 10, Comrade Swarajyam attended the meetings of the Communist Party along with her elder brother. She wrote and sang about the people's problems in the guise of Batukamma songs and popularised them among the masses. She attended political classes in Vijayawada at the age of 11. She conducted struggle of workers in the agricultural fields of her relatives. She started her life of struggle, facing attack from her relatives and friends. The multi-faceted warrior sang the songs about Ayilamma's struggle and the song of great Telugu poet Gurajada's "Puttadi bomma Poornamma" to mobilise women for the movement.

Comrade Swarajyam worked in Old Suryapet of Telangana, where she met her future husband and fellow comrade Mallu Venkata Narsimha Reddy, fondly called Com VN by the Party comrades. She mobilised the tribals of the place into the struggle. That struggle, which distributed ten lakh acres of land to the poor, established village states (grama rajya). In the area she was working, Swarajyam took the administrative responsibilities for the village states. Here

bonded labour was abolished and there was no caste and religious discrimination. In the village states, women had equal rights and women's consent was mandatory in decisions of marriages and divorces. Swarajyam took up the task of mobilising people through her songs on the people's problems and collected resources for the movement.

She went underground for seven years and, along with her squad, trained people on ways to escape the police and mobilised women to attack landlords. They snatched the guns from the landlords and distributed them to the people. She was among the 300 women who participated in the military training given by Major Jaipal Singh. During this period of armed struggles, the rulers announced a reward of Rs 10,000 for the leader of the Rajakka Dalam.

She married Com VN after the armed struggle ended and stood with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) after the split of the Communist Party of India in 1964. However, the fight against the landlords was not yet finished. The landlords tried to grab the land given to the people under the Bhoodan movement with the support of the rulers. Comrade Swarajyam worked to protect the lands of the poor farmers and workers and opposed the anarchist and murderous politics of the landlords. She contested as a candidate of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and she was elected as a member of the legislative assembly from the Tungathurthi constituency twice in 1978 and 1983. She also led the Andhra Pradesh Mahila Sangham as the state president from 1981 to 2002. As an MLA, she played a crucial role in gathering the support of the women in the assembly, to the rape victim Rameeza

Bee. This crime incident of 1978 shook the Hyderabad city at the time as the perpetrators were none other than four police officers. At Comrade Swarajyam's initiative, all the women members in the assembly, irrespective of their political affiliations, stood by the victim.

In 1983, she fought and won the elections against her younger brother, who joined the rival Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Her elder brother, who guided her in the movement in her youth, also entertained non-class tendencies in 1994. However, Swarajyam and Com VN continued to stand by the CPI(M). Comrade VN was well-known to the Telugu people as a warrior of the Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle, a secretary of the united Nalgonda district committee, and a member of the Party's Central Committee.

During her last years, even though physically weak to work among the public, Comrade Swarajyam continued to motivate the Party cadre to take up people's causes. The 91-year old visionary stood as a tall reminder of the bravery of the Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle. She exuberated the spirit of revolution every time she raised her fist, offering Red salutes to her comrades even when she was on ventilator support. She was a beloved daughter of the Red flag. She cautioned the people about the dangers inflicted by the corporate forces, and the dangers posed by communalism in the country. She urged the Party cadre to work closer with the people and mingle with them and that it was the only way to overcome the exploitation of the ruling class. She reiterated that class struggle is the only way to end the exploitative system. Treading that path is the only real homage one can pay her. □

SUNDARAYYA'S ABIDING INTEREST IN THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

- B V Raghavulu

Puchalapalli Sundarayya was a revolutionary whose efforts for theoretical studies were always linked to practice. Whatever subject he chose for study, be it examining the agrarian relations, or the developments in the fields of literature and culture, they were always linked to immediate needs of practice.

Sundarayya gave utmost importance to the study of concrete socio-economic conditions. He was averse to adducing conclusions without examining extensive information, including quantitative data and other types of evidence. His arguments and counter-arguments were always based on facts. That is why he was a researcher and a student throughout his life. He had a keen eye for minute detail. He always paid close attention to what ordinary people say. He always carried a big notebook in which to jot down useful information – gathering

facts and figures from wherever he could for later use. He had a strikingly large shirt pocket to accommodate this notebook.

He was considered as an expert on agrarian questions. His abiding interest in studying agrarian relations continued throughout his life.

Right from childhood, Sundarayya was able to recognise the role of the village in bringing about social change. At the very beginning of his political life, he came to the conclusion that it is not possible to achieve social change in the country without understanding the rural economy. He believed that understanding the village amounts to understanding the country. That is why, between 1929 and 1934, he spent most of his time in his native village, among the working people. In the village, he studied the caste system, which was the root cause for social oppression, and he fought against



it. He observed from close quarters the patriarchal relations that were entrenched in the village, and the unequal status of the women in every family. He came to understand the importance of women's equality. He carefully observed the various forms of economic exploitation of the rural poor. He noted how agricultural labourers were paid wages in kind in small measuring pots, how dalits were paid lower wages than others, and were overcharged in grocery and provisions shops. Sundarayya's understanding of the close relation between the ownership of land and exploitative, oppressive social relations was first gained from these experiences in his village.

During childhood, his interaction with the farm servants who used to narrate their living conditions and the deprivations they had to undergo at the hands of the landlords and the rich peasants of the village influenced in changing his class outlook and helped him in drafting a charter of demands on behalf of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers.

He studied the whole problem in depth and formulated the principles for the classification of the peasantry – that is, (for identifying the) classes of the peasantry that should be co-opted in our struggle against feudalism. Such classification was done for the first time in Andhra. He wrote an article in *New Age* in 1937 – based on revenue records – explaining in detail the whole class hierarchy in the coastal districts of Andhra. The issue of joint pattas and how much rent they were paying to the landlords was dealt with. More importantly, a broad categorisation of the peasant community was done, applying Marxist-Leninist theory. An alliance of the oppressed classes in the agricultural sector was proposed. The way in which the classification was done, using

the meagre revenue records that were available then, was extraordinary for those times.

During the underground period of the Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle, he toured villages and met many area committees to collect information on the basis of a questionnaire for understanding the class composition of the peasantry, applying Marxian principles. Using that information he wrote an incisive article, "The Agrarian Question at Present" which was published in *Janata*.

In the 1950s, there was an intense debate on agrarian issues inside the Communist Party. Sundarayya was among the most prominent of the many important leaders who participated in the discussion on how to formulate the Party's agrarian policies. He was a member of the sub-committee that prepared the draft of the agrarian policy document that was eventually accepted by the Central Committee in 1954 as the document titled "Our Tasks among the Peasant Masses." He also played an important role in formulating the document "Some Aspects of the Agrarian Question," adopted by the National Council of the Communist Party in 1958.

During this period, Sundarayya did a great deal of research on the agrarian question. In 1954, a committee constituted by the Communist Party in Andhra Pradesh prepared a report titled "The Party's Agrarian Programme in Andhra Districts." Sundarayya played an important role in drafting and finalising this report. In 1958, he wrote a note titled "The Party and Agricultural Labour," arguing for the necessity of improving the work of the Party among agricultural workers, and making his case, as always, with the help of experience

gained and information gathered from the field. He also wrote a note titled “Agrarian Reform Bill: Suggestions” in 1958.

Throughout his life, Sundarayya continued to use the field-based observation-and-study method that he imbibed in the course of his work in the villages. A good example of the application of this method is his research on two villages in Andhra Pradesh in 1974, on which his monograph, *The Land Question* (Sundarayya, 1976), was based. He also applied this method of study to the training classes that he conducted. In 1969, for example, he gave a lecture on diverse forms of extraction of surplus value in agriculture to cadre working on the agricultural labour front; the lecture was based on empirical information he had gathered in the field.

The importance of villages and agrarian relations for the revolutionary movement – recognised by Sundarayya in his childhood – has not diminished even today. If 80 per cent of people were living in villages then, 69 per cent of our population still lives in villages today (Census of India 2011). Despite the major changes that have occurred in the Indian economy over the last six or seven decades, the importance of agriculture has not diminished. Although the share of agriculture in GDP fell to 15 per cent in 2019, two-thirds of our population still depends on agriculture for their living. That is why agrarian studies continue to be a crucial aspect of the revolutionary movement.

In India, more than in any other country, the agrarian question continues to be not only a critical political issue but also the most controversial. It is an issue of great

complexity. Some of the reasons for the agrarian question becoming so complex in our country are the following: the size of our country, which is almost a sub-continent in itself; the historical evolution of diverse agrarian practices and relations in different regions; changes in agrarian relations brought about by colonial rulers; changes in post-Independence India that were driven by the needs of modern capitalism; and changes that occurred as a result of linking our agriculture with the world economic system in the neoliberal period. The present BJP communal government’s big push for unbridled/unrestrained opening up of agriculture to the Indian/foreign corporate sector further accentuates not only the agrarian crisis but also the dynamics of agrarian relations. This complexity naturally gives rise to differing perceptions and arguments, and also creates hurdles in arriving at common nationwide conclusions.

Most of the Left, in spite of other differences, subscribes to the view that radical agrarian reform, which includes the abolition of landlordism, is the foremost task before the revolutionary movement in India. But there are divergent views with regard to the importance of different contradictions in rural life and the role played by various rural classes in the struggle for radical social change.

If we have to understand the complexity of agrarian conditions and find proper answers to the various questions thrown up by that complexity for the revolutionary movement, there is no way forward other than the concrete study of concrete conditions. As Sundarayya did, we too will have to constantly undertake the study of agrarian relations especially at regional and sub- regional levels. □

HIMACHAL PRADESH MILK PRODUCERS HOLD DEMONSTRATION

- Onkar Shad

Hundreds of milk producers under the banner of Himachal Pradesh Dudh Utpadak Sangh (Milk Producers Association) held a massive demonstration in Duttanagar, in Rampur subdivision, under Shimla district. On March 7, the milk producers, mostly women, gathered in front of the Duttanagar office of Himachal Milk Processing Centre and submitted a memorandum through the sub-divisional officer to the chief minister of the state. The major demand is for an enhanced support price for milk at Rs 40 per litre.

The dharna at the site later turned out to be a public meeting that was attended by leaders of the milk producers. The HP Dudh Utpadak Sangh is affiliated with the All India Kisan Sabha. The public meeting warned the state government to

affirmatively consider the demands of the milk producers, else they will be forced to launch more vigorous agitations in the future.

The speakers informed that milk production has become a loss-making work for the large number of milk producers owing to two reasons: the first one being the rising cost of animal feed and rising costs for raising the cattle; and the second, the support price announced by the government is too low. The government currently provides a support price of Rs 21 per litre for milk with 3 per cent fat and 7.3 per cent SNF (Solids-Not-Fat), and for milk with 5.5 per cent fat and 8.5 per cent SNF at Rs 32.97 per litre. The same quality milk is sold in the market for Rs 50 and Rs 60 respectively.





The memorandum submitted to the chief minister pointed out that 90 per cent of the population in the state are living in rural habitats. Agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry are the main sources of income for the peasant population. But in some regions, animal husbandry is the main source of income and milk production is the only form of such income. There are innumerable problems linked to cattle and the state government has actually withdrawn many of the facilities provided earlier. It may be mentioned here that the quality of milk produced in the state, especially in those areas where cattle are left out for grazing in the natural grasslands of the Himalayas, is of a very high value. However, the government instead of recognising this still works with the conventional formulae of fat and SNF.

The speakers also narrated that the milk producers do not get their payment on time from the milk federation and there are very few collection centres. The kisans have to carry milk far away from their homes and then give it to these collection centres. This consumes a good lot of time of the milk producers in a day.

The main demands raised in the memorandum include: -

- ◆ Announce a minimum support price for milk at Rs 40 per litre.
- ◆ The milk producers must get their payments before the 10th of every month.
- ◆ Animal husbandry must be promoted and the government must ensure the distribution of cattle feed through the public distribution system.
- ◆ Every society of the milk producers must be provided with a machine to measure their quality of milk and should not be left to the mercy of buyers, both public and private.
- ◆ New collection centres must be opened at the block levels.
- ◆ Good quality artificial insemination and semen must be available, along with cattle medicines, at the veterinary centres.
- ◆ The vacant posts of vets, and technicians at the veterinary centres must be filled up immediately.
- ◆ Ensure a budget of Rs 50 crore for the state milk federation.
- ◆ Open new chilling plants at Nogli and Kotlu.
- ◆ Measure the quantity and quality of milk at the chilling plant sites to ensure transparency. □

AIKS HOLDS AGRARIAN SEMINARS IN ANDHRA PRADESH



Three impressive farmers' seminars were organised on April 26-27, 2022 at Guntur (Dist Guntur), Ongole (Dist Prakasham) and Vijayawada (Dist Krishna) in Andhra Pradesh by the AIKS and the AP Tenant Farmers' Union. They were attended by a total of around 700 farmers.

The topic of the three seminars was 'The Agrarian Crisis, Recent Farmers' Struggles, Their Lessons and Our Future Direction'. The main speaker was AIKS National President Dr Ashok Dhawale. Among those who presided over or addressed these seminars were AIKS and Tenant Farmers' Union leaders Y Kesava Rao, V Krishnaiah, P Jamalaiah, Laxman Rao, MLC, J Siva Sankar, P V Anjaneyulu, C H Saidhulu, P Hanumantha Rao, P Venkat Rao, S K Mabu, V Balakotaiah, R Vinod, J Jayantibabu, AIKSCC Prakasham district convenor Chundurur Ranga Rao, Tobacco Farmers' Union convenor Chenchu Sesaiah and others. At Guntur and Ongole, other AIKSCC leaders were also on the dais.



On May 8, the AIKS organised a seminar at Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh on 'The Agrarian Crisis in India and the Future Direction of Peasant Struggles'. It was presided over by noted poet S M Bhasha and the main speakers were AIKS President Dr Ashok Dhawale, Prof Purendra Prasad of the Hyderabad Central University, and P Jamalaiah, leader of the AP Tenant Farmers' Union. AIKS Anantapur district secretary Chandrashekhar Reddy introduced the seminar and AIKS district president T Nagaraj gave the vote of thanks. Senior CITU leader G Obulu and AIKS district vice president Rambhupal were on the dais. The audience comprised intellectuals, professors, teachers, journalists, doctors and lawyers, along with farmers, workers, women, youth and students.

KERALA KARSHAKA SANGHAM HOLDS TWO-DAY WORKSHOP



A two-day Workshop of Kerala Karshaka Sangham was held at Sultan Batheri, Wayanad on 21st and 22nd May. The Workshop was inaugurated by S Ramachandran Pillai, AIKS Vice President Vijoo Krishnan, Joint secretary of AIKS spoke on "Agrarian Crisis and Resistance", and P Krishnaprasad, Finance Secretary of AIKS spoke on "Agrarian Policy and Alternatives". K.N.Balagopal, Finance Minister of Kerala, Valsan Panoli, Karshaka Sangham Secretary and others also spoke on LDF government, Nava Keralam and Agriculture, and on Organisation respectively. Karshaka Sangham President M. Vijayakumar presided over the Workshop. About 130 delegates who lead the Karshaka Sangham in the State attended the Workshop.



Padyatra of hundreds of landless farmers to Rewa collectorate in MP with demands of employment, minimum wages, MGNREGA, and other issues



On the demand of irrigation, AIKS organised protest in Sri Ganganagar district of Rajasthan



On May 24, at the call of SKM Haryana, Kisan Sabha Haryana across the state protested for local demands of farmers, and submitted charter of demands to the State government. Demonstrations were held in Jind, Yamunanagar, Kaithal, Fatehabad, Rohtak, and other districts.



The first Karnataka State Convention of Dairy farmers was held at Chickaballapur. AIKS Finance Secretary P Krishnaprasad inaugurated the convention, which was presided over by Comrade Venkattachallaya. KPRS President Bayyareddy and Secretary Basavaraj addressed the gathering. The convention decided to convene district to village level conventions and organise 29 lakh dairy farmers in Karnataka.



On behalf of the Tamilnadu Vivasagal Sangam, a protest was held in front of the District Collector Office emphasising the important demands of the farmers in Thiruvannamalai. More than 300 farmers participated in the protest led by District President Palaraman. Extensive talks with the District Collector were held. Following demands were made:

1. Compensation should be given immediately to the farmers affected by the tower of Uyarmin.
2. All the paddy brought by farmers should be purchased.
3. Action should be taken to get adequate fertilizer for farmers.
4. Fair investigation into the fraud of the irregularities in the Primary Agricultural Co-operative Societies (PACS)



On 13th May milk farmers' convention organised at Kozhikode by Kerala Karshaka Sangham



75 years of the historic and legendary Tebhaga struggle observed at Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal



The Quaide Milleth educational and social trust based in Chennai, TN has honoured the Samyukta Kisan Morcha by presenting Quaide Milleth award for probity in political life for the year 2021 at Chennai. General Secretary of All India Kisan Sabha and SKM's executive member Hannan Mollah received the award from Director of The Hindu publications, senior journalist and Padma Bhushan awardee N Ram. It had a cash award of Rs 2.5 lakhs towards the struggle fund of SKM.

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Freedom Fighter,

Founding Member
of AIKS,

Leader of
Telangana Armed
Struggle

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