PEASANTS AND REVOLUTION

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"In colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms. . .

That view of the revolutionary potentiality of the peasantry was expressed by Frantz Fanon, ideologue of the Algerian revolution. From time to time, throughout the centuries, the peasant has indeed risen in rebellion against his oppressors. But history is also replete with examples of peasantry which has borne silently and for long periods extremes of exploitation and oppression. At the same time occasional outbreaks of peasant revolt do raise the question of the conditions in which the peasant ***becomes*** revolutionary.

We cannot speak of the peasantry in this context as a homogenous and undifferentiated mass. Its different sections have different aims and social perspectives; for each of them is confronted with a different set of problems. The constellation of peasant forces which participates in a revolutionary movement depends upon the character of the revolution or, as Marxists would see it, the "historical stage" which it represents. Thus, when a revolutionary movement progresses from the "bourgeois-democratic revolution" to the "socialist revolution" the rôles of the different sections of the peasantry no longer remain the same.

As a generalization about the revolutionary potentiality of the peasantry, Fanon's statement, thus, begs many questions. Equally question-begging are those generalizations which dismiss the peasantry as a backward, servile and reactionary class, incapable of joining hands with forces of social revolution. The peasants have in fact played a rôle, sometimes a crucial and decisive rôle, in revolutions. The Chinese revolution is a case in point.

The question that needs to be asked, therefore, is not whether the peasants are or are not revolutionary but, rather, under what circumstances do they become revolutionary or what rôles do different sections of the peasantry play in revolutionary situations. These are questions which greatly interest socialist movements in countries with predominantly peasant populations. The main tradition of Marxist theory, until the turn of the century, took its stand firmly on the dominant, or even exclusive, revolutionary rôle of the industrial proletariat. But Marx and Engels were painfully aware of the fact that if the industrial proletariat was to fulfil its historic tasks by leading the forces of

revolution it would have to mobilize peasant support, especially in countries with predominantly peasant populations. For socialists, moreover, the question is not merely that of mobilizing peasant support as a ***means*** for achieving success in their struggle. The question is not just that of ***utilizing*** the forces of the peasantry. The free and active participation of the peasantry in transforming their mode of existence and giving shape to the new society, in itself, must be an essential part of the socialist goal.

Lenin's concept of alliance of the working class and the peasantry was a major advance on earlier Marxist propositions; for it was based on a detailed analysis of the transformations that were taking place in the agrarian economy of Russia and the pattern of social forces that was emerging as a result. Lenin based the Bolshevik strategy *vis-à-vis* the peasantry in accordance with that analysis and he modified it as the Russian revolution progressed through its different stages. But, in the event, the actual rôle of the peasantry in the Russian revolution was somewhat different from that which was anticipated by the theory. The proletarian revolution did not begin in the countryside until the summer of 1918.[2] Despite Lenin's repeated calls, ever since 1905, for the independent organization of the poor peasants, the Bolsheviks had little success in achieving this. Despite the formidable combination of a brilliant, experienced and capable leadership, which was fully committed to the task of mobilizing the poor peasants, and the very promising background of peasant unrest, the Bolsheviks did not succeed in the task which they had set themselves. It is precisely this fact which makes a careful study of the Russian experience so important; for the reason for the failure, such as it was, lay primarily in the conditions which govern the behaviour of the different sections of the peasantry in relation to revolutionary situations.

By contrast, the peasantry played a decisive rôle in the Chinese revolution. Mao attributes this revolutionary energy largely to the poor peasantry, who, according to him, provided both the leadership and the main force of the peasant revolution. If this is true the Chinese accomplished what the Russians were not able to achieve and what Lenin had said ***could*** not be achieved until after the proletariat had won political power.[3] But here again we find the facts do not bear out very accurately the theoretical propositions that were advanced. In the Chinese case, however, the gap between theory and practice, one might say, allowed the Chinese communists not to depart too far from the doctrinal demands of Stalin's Comintern while at the same time in ***practice*** following a policy which was in accord with the objective demands of the Chinese situation. In Asian countries there has been an awareness of the similarity in their situation with that of the Chinese. There has been a great respect for the Chinese success in bringing about a mobilization of the peasantry to participate actively in the task of transforming the countryside. Willingness to learn from the Chinese has not been

confined to communists. As an example one may refer to the report of a delegation sent by the Government of India to China, in 1957, just for this purpose.[4] But if the Chinese example is to teach any lessons we shall find them not purely in their theoretical formulations but in their actual practice. What needs to be done, therefore, is to re-examine the theory and the facts.

In India it is sometimes claimed that the nationalist movement aroused the peasantry and took up its cause against feudal lords. Socialist and Communist critics of the government recognize the fact, however, that the ruling Congress Party draws its support in rural areas from rich peasants, whose interests it has tried to advance in implementing the land reform, at the expense of the middle peasants and the poor peasants. But the Left has not been able to bring about any direct action by the peasant masses in defence of their interests. Instead they rely on political agitation to take them along the peaceful parliamentaryroad to socialism[5] so that when they are voted into power, they will implement land reform in the interests of the mass of the peasants. We shall consider some aspects of the peasant movement in India and the two major peasant uprisings which occurred in that country in recent years in order to assess the rôles of the different classes of the Indian peasantry. We shall consider the problem of mobilization of the peasantry in the Indian situation and some of the difficulties that arise in this respect in a purely parliamentary approach to the Socialist Revolution.

We propose, in this essay, to consider the rôles which different sections of the peasantry have played in the case of Russia, China and India. We shall examine the pre-conditions which appear to be necessary to bring about the revolutionary mobilization of the peasantry to participate in the struggle for socialism, whether it be peaceful and constitutional or insurrectionary. We shall put forward certain hypotheses which, in our view, throw a fresh light on certain aspects of our problem. These hypotheses need to be considered further, especially, in the light of experience of other countries. We would like to emphasize at the outset that these propositions are being advanced tentatively and to open up a discussion on certain aspects of the problem which so far appear to have been obscured. There are no easy answers to the questions which have been raised. Nor will they be found in purely intellectual speculation. They must, in the final analysis, be learned from the experience of actual struggle. But one must raise the questions before answers can be found.

Our hypothesis concerns the respective rôles of the so-called *middle peasants* and *poor peasants* and the pre-conditions that we find are necessary for the revolutionary mobilization of *poor peasants*. Before we proceed further we must clarify the precise meaning of these terms; although they are in common use they tend to be used rather loosely. The fault perhaps lies with the terminology itself. It appears to focus

attention on relative differences in wealth (or poverty), which can be categorized only arbitrarily, rather than on class relations which must be clearly defined.

The division of the peasantry into ***rich peasants, middle peasants*** and ***poorpeasants*** suggests an array of the peasantry with the different strata arranged, one over the other, in a single order. This is misleading; the ***middle peasants,*** for instance, do not stand ***between*** the ***rich peasants*** and the ***poor peasants;*** they belong to a different sector of the rural economy.

In the transitional historical situations we shall deal with, a distinction may be made broadly between three sectors of the rural economy. Firstly, we have the sector of which the essential distinguishing feature is that the land is owned by ***landlords*** who do not themselves undertake its cultivation. Their land is cultivated by landless tenants, mostly ***sharecroppers,*** who are classed as ***poor peasants.*** The second sector is that of ***independent small-holders,*** who own the land which they cultivate themselves. They do not exploit the labour of others. They are the ***middle peasants. A*** special case of middle peasants was that of the allotment-holding peasants in Russia who were obliged to work for landlords because of various disabilities, imposed upon them, which survived the "Emancipation" of 1861. The third sector is that of ***capitalist farmers,*** who are described as the ***rich peasants,*** who own substantial amounts of land. Their distinguishing characteristic is that their farming is based primarily on the exploitation of wage labour; although they often participate in farm work themselves. Unlike ***landlords,*** they undertake the business of farming on their own account and employ capital in it. The ***farm labourers,*** who are paid a contractual wage, are referred to as the ***agricultural proletariat*** and sometimes included with the other sections of the exploited peasantry, viz. ***sharecroppers,*** etc., in the term ***poor peasants.*** We would prefer to use the terms ***capitalist farmers, independent small-holders, sharecroppers*** and ***farm labourers,*** which are clearly more descriptive of their respective occupational rôles than the terms ***richpeasant, middlepeasant andpoorpeasant.*** But as our discussion is concerned so much with the statements and writings of others who have used the latter set of terms, we cannot avoid using them. While using that terminology, however, we would like not to lose sight of the essential difference in the class situation of the independent peasant small-holders, i.e. the middle peasants, and the exploited mass of the peasantry, viz. the poor peasants, whether they be sharecroppers working for landlords or farm labourers working for capitalist farmers. Thus we have one sector of independent peasants and two other sectors characterized by a master and subordinate relationship.

We should qualify this threefold classification by pointing out that there is a great deal of overlapping between these categories, and the demarcation between them is not sharp and clear. But broadly, a distinction between the categories is valid enough. Thus a peasant who

owns a tiny patch of land but depends for his livelihood ***mainly*** on sharecropping for a landlord or working as a farm labourer, is a poor peasant; we would not regard him as a middle peasant even though he owns some land. Again, a middle peasant who employs only occasional casual labour, to cope with peak operations, would be regarded by us as a middle peasant rather than a rich peasant; for his livelihood does not depend primarily on exploitation.

II

The peasants were given a definite place in the Bolshevik revolutionary strategy under Lenin's slogan of "Alliance of the Working Class and the Peasantry." However, the rôle of the peasantry in the Russian revolution is sometimes exaggerated out of all proportion. Thus, Lichtheim writes: "The uniqueness of Lenin—and the Bolshevik organization which he founded and held together—lay in the decision to make the agrarian upheaval do the work of the proletarian revolution."[6] Neither the facts of the Russian revolution nor Lenin's theoretical formulations support such a judgment. It was in the towns and the cities that the Bolsheviks first seized power, for the class struggle in the countryside had not yet developed.' That was the conclusion which Lenin had reached after the October revolution. His attitude towards the peasantry had evolved continuously, in response to the developments that were taking place in the Russian countryside. From the point of view of the rôle assigned to the peasantry in Bolshevik revolutionary strategy, one can broadly distinguish three periods, in each of which we find a distinct theoretical stand. The first period was that up to the revolution of 1905, although we can see the change in Lenin's views already beginning to take place after the peasant upsurge of 1902. The second period was that between 1905 and 1917. The third period, being one of re-assessment, was that after the October revolution.

The central feature which determined the perspective of the first period was Lenin's view of the dynamic growth of agrarian capitalism in Russia and the decay of the feudal economy. As early as 1893 the young Lenin had begun to see "New Economic Developments in Peasant Life," the subject of the earliest of his writings to be preserved. In 1899 he published his first major work, entitled ***The Development of Capitalism in Russia,*** two-thirds of which is devoted to a brilliant and thoroughly documented analysis of the capitalist revolution in the Russian countryside, the decay of the feudal economy and the complex variety of transitional forms which had emerged. Without going into details of the rural economy of Russia at the turn of the century, we must, for our purposes, point out some of its salient features.[8]

A crucial factor, which inflamed the Russian countryside both in 1905–7 and again in 1917 was the peculiar problem of the allotment land holder, the Russian middle peasant, which was left behind as a

legacy of the Emancipation of 1861. By the edict of Emancipation the serf had received as "allotment" the land which he had cultivated before, but with a portion of it withheld by the landlord; such portions withheld were called the "cut-off lands." For Russia as a whole the proportion of "cut-off" land is estimated to have been about a fifth of the peasants' original holdings. But the crucial fact about the "cut-off lands" was not their relative size but the type of land which was taken away from the peasant, and its *rôle* in the peasant economy. They deprived the peasant of meadows and pastures, water courses and access to woods, which were all essential to the peasant economy. Moreover, the peasant was required to pay for the allotment land. He could do so by giving labour to the landlord or opt to make money payments which considerably exceeded the rental value of the allotment lands. The peasant could terminate his "temporary obligation" by making a "redemption payment" which again was in excess of the market value of the land; moreover, the peasant had to borrow to make such payments. The need to work off these obligations to the landlord together with the surviving feudal laws and institutions such as the commune, tied the peasant to the village and his land, and forced him to work for his landlord on unfavourable terms. This relationship between the middle peasant and landlords, a source of deep and direct conflict, was a feature peculiar to Russia.

Much of the landlords' land was, however, cultivated by share-croppers—poor peasants—who had little or no land but who possessed some farm implements and horses. A distinction between the situation of such poor peasants and that of the middle peasants, as described above, is important. The middle peasant had a substantial allotment and had also access to communal grazing and woodland. His livelihood did not depend totally on the landlord; but his obligations to the landlord were an insufferable burden. In the case of the poor peasant, the sharecropper, his livelihood depended on his being able to get the land, from the landlord, for cultivation. Although he was exploited he was too dependent on the landlord to be able to oppose him as the middle peasant could.

Some landlords' lands were being cultivated by hired farm workers—already a transition to capitalist farming. But it was the industrious Kulaks, the rural bourgeoisie, who conducted farming as a business, and employed wage labour, the rural proletariat. In the growth of agrarian capitalism in Russia, Lenin saw a powerful force for the bourgeois-democratic revolution which would open the door for the socialist revolution.[9] Plekhanov, and even more so some of the extreme Mensheviks, had looked exclusively to the growth of industrial capitalism for the maturation of the forces of revolution. This offered a rather dismal prospect to socialists, of an interminably long interlude of capitalist development before Russia could be ripe for the socialist revolution. The Mensheviks looked upon the peasantry as a con-

servative and reactionary force. Seen against the background of such ideas, the Narodnik view, that the peasant commune provided Russia with a unique opportunity for a direct transition to a socialist order, was not altogether without its attractions. Even Marx and Engels were not without some sympathy for it.[10] Lenin rejected this idea as utopian. He saw the commune as a survival of the old feudal order which was to be swept away. The middle peasant, the mainstay of the commune, was disintegrating as a class. With the inexorable advance of capitalism they were being pauperized and the peasantry polarized into two classes, the capitalist farmers and the rural proletariat. The immediate task, in his view, was to assist and speed up this process, by fighting for the removal of the survivals of feudalism which tended to slow down the advance of agrarian capitalism.

Lenin, thus, looked upon the classes in the capitalist sector of the agrarian economy, rather than upon the disintegrating class of middle peasants, to provide the forces for the struggle against feudal survivals and the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. However, in 1901, he tended to discount even the rural labourer as an effective revolutionary force. In his *Iskra* article of April 1901, which set out the agrarian programme of the Iskra-ists, he wrote: "Our rural labourers are still too closely connected with the peasantry, they are still too heavily burdened with the misfortunes of the peasantry generally, to enable the movement of rural workers to assume national significance either now or in the immediate future."[11] Thus, he argued, "the whole essence of our agrarian programme is that the rural proletariat must fight together with the rich peasantry for the abolition of the remnants of serfdom, for the cut-off lands."[12] It was for the industrial proletariat to provide revolutionary leadership. But in the agrarian field it was the rural bourgeoisie who would provide the main force for the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

The central issue of the agrarian programme was the demand for the restitution of the cut-off lands and the abolition of the remnants of serfdom. But Lenin over-estimated the rôle of the rural bourgeoisie in this struggle and curiously ignored the rôle of the middle peasant who was most directly concerned with it. The challenge of the kulak to the feudal system was an economic one—it lay in his greater efficiency, his ability to pay higher wages to the farm labourers and his competitive strength in bidding for land available for buying or leasing. But he was outside the feudal sector and was not directly involved in conflict with the landowners. He resented being accorded an inferior social status by the nobility. But this was not cause enough for him to engage in battle.

When the great peasant upheaval began in 1905 it was the middle peasant who provided its main force in the fight for cut-off lands. Hot on the heels of Bloody Sunday, on 9 January, which inaugurated the revolution of 1905, the peasants rose in revolt in February. Peasant

jacqueries flared up all over Russia and continued to inflame the countryside in 1905 and the two following years, long after the revolution in towns had been extinguished. The respective rôles of the different sections of the peasantry in this revolutionary upsurge is described by Robinson thus: "Such revolutionary leanings as existed in rural Russia had chiefly come out of the relations of small, land-short, farmers with large landholders rather than the relations of proletarians and "half-proletarian" labourers with capitalist cultivators. . . . Sometimes the better-off peasants joined with the rest in depradations upon the estates, and particularly in the cutting and carting-off of timber and in the illicit pasturing of cattle. However, there were at least a few cases in which the attacks of the peasants were directed against the richer members of their own class rather than against the landlords; and no doubt because of a fear of loss to themselves, the richer peasants. . . were often ***indifferent or openly hostile*** to the agrarian movement.. . . On the other hand the agricultural wage workers who had no land . . . were not usually the leaders of the agrarian movement in general or even of the labour strikes on the estates. . . . Indeed there developed in certain instances a definite hostility between the agricultural proletariat and those peasants who divided their time between the landlords' fields and their own."[13] (Emphasis added.)

The kulak's rôle in the peasant uprising was ambivalent. He did not lead the attack on the landlords for the restitution of cut-off lands, for that was a matter which concerned the middle peasants. Indeed, as Robinson has pointed out, he was himself sometimes the target of attack and he was often indifferent or openly hostile to the peasant uprising. On the other hand, he often found the tide too strong not to go along with it, and he participated in the attacks on landlords' manors and the looting that followed.

Until 1905 the Bolsheviks had looked upon the rural bourgeoisie, the kulaks, to provide the forces for the bourgeois-democratic revolution in the countryside. They had not paid much attention to organizing the broad mass of the peasantry themselves. In the *Iskra* article he had written in 1901 Lenin had virtually written off the rural proletariat as a force which was "still wholly in the future." He added that "we must include peasant demands in our programme, not in order to transfer convinced Social-Democrats from the towns to the countryside, not in order to chain them to the village, but to guide the activity of those forces which ***cannot*** find an outlet anywhere except in the rural localities. . . ."[14] But after the peasant upsurge of 1902 Lenin's outlook was changed. He wrote: "The purely practical requirements of the movement have of late lent special urgency to the task of propaganda and agitation in the countryside." The basic strategy of the bourgeois-democratic revolution still was that "the rural proletariat must fight ***together with*** the rich peasantry for the abolition of the remnants of serfdom." Only the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution

would lead to the "final separation of the rural proletariat from the landholding peasantry."[15]

By 1905 the bourgeois-democratic revolution was still far from being completed. But, with the peasant uprisings of that year, the Bolshevik attitude changed fundamentally. Writing in March 1905, Lenin gave the call to organize the rural proletariat in the same manner as they had organized the urban proletariat. He added: "We must explain to it that its interests are antagonistic to those of the bourgeois peasantry; we must call upon it to fight for the socialist revolution."[16] After this Lenin repeatedly exhorted the Bolsheviks to organize the poor peasantry; but they had little success in doing so.

The basic unit of peasant organization was the traditional village assembly. Ordinarily it was dominated by the rich peasants, the kulaks. In a revolutionary situation, however, at times of violent action, it was the middle peasants who carried the day. The poor peasants remained in the background. The peasants' organization at the national level was the All-Russian Peasants' Union, which was largely under the influence of the kulaks. At its first congress in the summer of 1905, "the delegates themselves indicated that in most places the work of organizing the peasants had hardly begun as yet."[17] The political leadership of the peasantry was in the hands of the Social Revolutionaries who, also, represented primarily the rich peasant. The Bolsheviks never quite managed to get a firm foothold amongst the peasantry.

By 1917 we find Lenin more cautious and less certain about the possibility of organizing the poor peasantry independently. In his historic "April Thesis" he asked that: "Without necessarily splitting the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies at once, the party of the proletariat must make clear the necessity of organizing separate Soviets of Poor (semi-proletarian) Peasants, or, at least, of holding constant separate conferences of peasant deputies of *this* class *status* in the shape of separate fractions or parties within the general Soviets of Peasants' Deputies." But he was by no means confident that this task would be accomplished. In his "April Thesis" he continued: "At the present moment we cannot say for certain whether a powerful agrarian revolution will develop in the Russian countryside in the near future. We cannot say exactly how profound is the class cleavage within the peasantry. . . . Such questions will be, and can be, decided only by actual experience."[18]

The pattern of the peasant upheavals which did develop in 1917 is rather complex. There were two sets of struggles, between peasants and landlords, and amongst the peasants themselves, in which the alignments cut across each other. The main peasant struggle in 1917, as before in 1905–7, was that of the middle peasants against landowners for the cut-off lands and for the abolition of the surviving feudal restrictions. The intervening years had been relatively quiet. Now, once more, peasant struggle was precipitated by the decay of agriculture,

depletion of stocks and food shortage, and high prices of goods. This time the struggle was more intense and violent than in the earlier period; in some respects, but only occasionally, it was more advanced in character.

A factor which possibly contributed much to the greater militancy of the middle peasant in the second period was the fact that Stolypin's agrarian policy had, in the intervening years, loosened many of the feudal bonds which had tied down the middle peasant. He already had the taste of some more freedom. Also Bolshevik ideas had made a big impact on the soldier, the peasant in uniform, who participated with the industrial worker in making the socialist revolution. Deserters returning from the front carried with them the ferment of the new ideas and an attitude of militancy into the countryside. Now, as before, the struggle was concentrated on the meadows and forests; the most frequent forms of action consisted of seizures of hay and wood. Manors were looted and burned, more often than before. An advance on the previous situation, however, was that in some cases village Land Committees (set up by the provisional government to mediate disputes between peasants and landlords) became vehicles for the seizure and distribution of land. Maynard suggests that "there was, paradoxically, a certain system, even a certain order, in the proceedings. Peasants did not seize the land which had not been cultivated by them or their forbears."[19] It is more likely that in actual practice the proceedings were not quite so orderly as Maynard imagines; there was little to stop the peasants from taking an optimistic view of their claims, except the competing claims of their fellows. However, the fact that the peasant should, even in revolution, have invoked his claim to what was rightfully his, reflects his conservative respect for private property and the fact that, in the main, the seizures of land were confined to the cut-off lands. Once again, it was the middle peasant who was in the forefront of the struggle. The attitude of the kulak remained, as before, a contradictory one—fear and even hostility combined with not too reluctant participation in sharing the loot. The rural proletarians similarly joined with the others in the looting. But they did not emerge as an independent force and did not rise against their masters, the kulaks.

There was another, quite distinct, struggle in the rural districts, in which the middle peasant found himself mostly in conflict with the other two sections of the peasantry. This was the struggle of those who wished to preserve the communes against the "separators." During the inter-revolutionary years legislation had been promulgated providing for the dissolution of repartitional tenure in communes and the establishment of hereditary holdings, which would make land a commodity and the physical consolidation of holdings which would make possible the establishment of individual farms free from communal restrictions. The pressure to break up the communes came from the enterprising "communal kulaks" (the other kulaks held their land outside the

communes) who wished to be free from communal restrictions. It also came from the poor peasants whose tiny holdings served only to tie them to the village but gave them no livelihood. The middle peasant, however, had little to gain and much to lose by a breakdown of the commune. He staunchly opposed the "separators" and passions ran high. The middle peasants often resisted successfully the attempts to "separate" and in many cases peasants who had left were forced to return and pool their land again. Thus in these cases the middle peasants were, once again, the effective force in the village.

These divisions and conflicts amongst the peasantry, evidently, did not allow the formation of "revolutionary peasant committees," which Lenin had urged should be formed. The peasant Soviets, where they existed at all, existed at the county and provincial level and were mostly dominated by Right-wing Social Revolutionaries, the spokesmen of the kulaks. The rôle of the peasantry in the Revolution was an indirect one, although by no means an unimportant one. The Bolshevik formula was that they seized power in alliance with the peasantry as a whole. If the rôle of the peasantry must be called an "alliance," it was, from the side of the peasantry, undeclared, unorganized and without a clear direction. Moreover, it could hardly be called an alliance with "the peasantry as a whole," for the peasantry was deeply divided. In later controversy Stalin argued that the proletarian revolution was carried out by the proletariat "together with the poor peasantry." He supports this by quoting Lenin's repeated calls, after 1905, for mobilizing the poor peasantry. As we have seen, this does not, of course, mean that the Bolsheviks actually succeeded in achieving that objective. Lenin's own post-revolutionary assessments make it quite clear that this was not so.

In October 1918, looking back on the experience of the Revolution, Lenin explained the Bolshevik failure to mobilize the poor peasants: "Owing to the immaturity, the backwardness, the ignorance, precisely of the poor peasants, the leadership (in the Soviets) passed into the hands of the kulaks. . . . A year after the proletarian revolution in the capitals, and under its influence and with its assistance, the proletarian revolution began in the remote rural districts."[1] But why did the Bolsheviks fail to break down the backwardness and the ignorance of the peasantry, despite at least a decade of commitment to just that task? Lenin perceived the fact that the true explanation lay beyond the subjective factor. He became aware of the existence of what we have referred to as the necessary pre-conditions for the mobilization of the poor peasantry — although he expressed it in a form which refers only to the Russian experience. Thus, in 1920, he referred to such pre-conditions as "a truth which has been fully proved by Marxist theory and fully corroborated by the experience of the proletarian revolution in Russia, viz. although all the three above-enumerated categories of the rural population (i.e. the rural proletariat, semi-proletarians and

small peasants) . . . are economically, socially and culturally interested in the victory of socialism, they are capable of giving resolute support to the revolutionary proletariat only *after* the latter has won political power, only *after* it has resolutely dealt with the big landowners and capitalists, only *after* these down-trodden people see in *practice* that they have an organized leader and champion, strong and firm enough to assist and lead them and show them the right path." Lenin was generalizing here from the Russian experience; he was not elaborating a Marxist text. The Chinese experience as well as examples from India show us, however, that the prior seizure of state power by the proletariat is only one of several alternative forms in which the necessary preconditions for the mobilization of the poor peasantry may be realized.

III

The Chinese Communist Party set out on its revolutionary course in the Leninist tradition. But in the first few years of its life its work had been concentrated largely on the urban proletariat, and students and intellectuals. Very little work had been done amongst the peasantry. Jane Degras quotes a report of the E.C. of the Comintern according to which, in 1926, the working-class membership of the CCP was 66 per cent of the total and peasant membership no more than 5 per cent.[11] It was also amongst the industrial proletariat that Mao Tse-tung began his work, to use his own words, as a "practical marxist" after he had spent some time in study and writing as a "theoretical marxist." As secretary of the Hunan party he organized miners, railway workers, municipal workers, etc. He did very little work amongst the peasantry at the time. It was not until 1925 that Mao became aware of the revolutionary potentiality of the peasantry. "Formerly," he told Edgar Snow, "I had not fully realized the degree of class struggle among the peasantry. But after the May 30 (1925) Incident, and during the great wave of political activity which followed it, the Hunanese peasantry became very militant. I . . . began a rural organization campaign."[12] A new chapter had opened in the history of Chinese communism.

Peasant riots and uprisings had been endemic in China at the time. Several factors had precipitated such a situation. Perhaps the most important of them all was the constant civil war amongst war lords and the excessive taxes and levies extracted by them as well as by the Government tax collectors. Another factor of some importance was that in those "troubled times" many of the old "gentry" who had moved to urban centres were no longer present in the village to exercise their direct personal authority, which they enjoyed by virtue of their wealth as well as traditional social status. The removal of the men who had exercised power on the spot loosened social control in the villages, enabled the peasants to gain more confidence and allowed peasant militancy to develop. However, perhaps the most decisive factor lay

in the operations of the "Revolutionary Army" which had been established in 1923 by the Kuomintang government of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, with the support of the Chinese Communists and with help from the Soviet Union. In February 1925 the Revolutionary Army launched its First Eastern Expedition, the first of several expeditions against warlords. This was followed by the Southern Expedition and, in the summer of 1926, by the famous Northern Expedition. It is significant that on the eve of the Northern Expedition nearly two-thirds of the nearly one million members of the peasant associations were in the Kwangtung province,[8] which was one of the principal areas of operations of the Revolutionary Army during the Eastern and the Southern Expeditions.

The peasant movement was not created by the Communist Party nor by the genius of one man. Mao was drawn into the peasant movement only after it had already begun. But the organizing genius of Mao enabled it to reach new heights. In 1925 he began to train cadres for the peasant movement at the "Institute of the Peasant Movement." At the end of the year he took his students to Hunan and established contacts with active elements amongst the peasantry and set up peasant associations in townships. A solid foundation was laid to provide leadership and organization for the peasant movement so that when it arose again in the following year it rose with full force.

Mao summed up his experience of the peasant movement in two essays which are regarded as classics of Maoism. The first of these was an article entitled "An Analysis of the Various Classes of the Chinese Peasantry and Their Attitudes Toward Revolution,"[9] which was published in January 1926. The other was his celebrated "Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan" which he wrote a year later. Stuart Schram has pointed out what, at first sight, appears a rather curious "deviation" from the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy in the original versions of these two texts. He has shown that in the original versions the leading revolutionary rôle of the industrial proletariat is not specifically mentioned but that appropriate references to that effect were only subsequently added in 1951. Does this mean that at this stage Mao had abandoned the basic principle of Marxism-Leninism, viz. the principle of proletarian revolutionary leadership? In his analysis of Maoism, Isaac Deutscher has referred to the fact that "Mao ... recognized more and more explicitly the peasantry as the sole *active* force of the revolution, until, to all intents and purposes he turned his back on the urban working class."[10] But this, as Deutscher has shown, came later. It came after the defeat of the revolution when, following the Autumn-Harvest Uprising of 1927, Mao and his comrades, with the core of what later became the Red Army, marched to the Chingkang Mountains and established a revolutionary base there. At first, as Deutscher has argued, the "withdrawal into the countryside" was thought to be only a temporary strategy, a marking of time until condi-

tions for an urban insurrection revived. It was only "gradually (that Mao) became aware of the implications of his move." In 1926, therefore, the point of departure of Maoism had not yet arrived. And it came two years later not as a premeditated change of strategy but one which was imposed upon him by the logic of the situation.

To return to Schram's contention, what explanation can we then find of Mao's omission, in 1926 and 1927, of references to the leadership of the proletariat. Schram's explanation is that "Mao's position at this time constitutes neither orthodox Leninism nor a heresy ***beyond*** Leninism, but rather the gropings of a young man who has not yet thoroughly understood Lenin." He continues, "the Hunan Report is neither 'orthodox' nor 'heretical' Leninism; it is essentially a-Marxist."[10] Such a contention is quite untenable. It was his understanding of Marxism that led Mao, son of a peasant, to spend his early years of revolutionary work amongst the urban proletariat. Moreover, the issue of proletarian leadership in the revolution was a central issue in the CCP at the time. One cannot presume that the question was simply not in Mao's mind at the time. However, two facts may suggest an explanation. Firstly, if Mao had brought up the issue of the leadership of the revolution, he could hardly have avoided a frontal attack on the view that was then being put forward by the Cornintern; evidently, young Mao did not wish to take that course. Secondly, the two documents were written in the heat of controversy in which Mao wished to establish "the agrarian revolution as constituting the main content of the Chinese bourgeois-democratic revolution and the peasants as its basic force."[11] He had done no more in these documents than to portray the revolutionary potentialities of the different sections of the peasantry. He had not engaged in a theoretical analysis of overall revolutionary strategy. Moreover, it should be added that there is nothing in these documents to compare with the careful and detailed analysis which Lenin had made of the processes which were at work in the Russian rural society and were transforming it. Mao learnt his lessons in the field; the essence of Maoism must be sought in his revolutionary practice rather than in writings, which do not always reflect accurately his own practice in so far as he had to pay lip service to Comintern orthodoxy in order to gain the freedom to follow the demands of the Chinese situation. Mao, the "theoretical Marxist," had a rôle which did not always coincide with that of Mao the "practical Marxist."

The paradox of Mao is exemplified particularly by his attempt to make the facts of the Hunan Movement fit Comintern orthodoxy by the simple device of redefinition of categories, as we shall see below. In his Report, Mao was at pains to demonstrate that both the leadership as well as the main force of the peasant movement came from the poor peasant which, in theory at least, made the facts of the Hunan Movement fit Stalin's conception of what was to be expected. But to appreciate the true character of the Hunan Movement we shall briefly

consider the pattern of China's rural society and the main problems of the peasantry.

Capitalist farming had not yet developed in China, as it had in Russia. According to figures given by Mao, the size of the agricultural proletariat in China was less than 2 per cent of the total number of the peasantry.[3] There were, thus, two main sectors of the rural economy of China. One was dominated by landlords, who controlled a large proportion of the land (Mao gives figures of 60 per cent to 70 per cent) which was cultivated by poor peasants, i.e. sharecroppers, who had either no land or a very little land. Big landlords who owned more than 500 mou (i.e. 83 acres) were less than 0.1 per cent of the rural population. Small landlords made up 0.6 per cent of the rural population. The "semi-proletariat," who worked for them, consisted, according to Mao's classification, of (1) semi-landholders (16 per cent) who owned too little land for their subsistance, (2) sharecroppers (19 per cent) who owned no land but owned the implements, etc., with which they worked the landlords' lands, and (3) the poor peasants (19 per cent) who owned neither land nor implements. The other sector was that of the independent peasant landholders, i.e. the middle peasants (38 per cent), whom Mao further classifies into three sub-classes: (1) those with an annual surplus (3.7 per cent of the total peasantry), (2) those who were just self-sufficient (19 per cent), and (3) those who had an annual deficit (15 per cent).

Three dominant problems stood out in the Chinese countryside. The first of these was that of putting an end to the exploitation of the landlords or at least of easing its burden by a reduction of the share of the crop taken by them. Secondly, there was the question of rectifying the very uneven distribution of land as between cultivators, of providing secondary employment in order to relieve pressure of population on land and improving the level of technique so that all cultivators could enjoy a reasonable livelihood. But the solution of that problem would have to await the socialist revolution. Finally there was an immediate problem which in fact gave rise to the peasant movement and determined its character. That was the problem of the excessive demands made by war-lords and tax officials on the peasantry. The aftermath of Yuan Shih-kai's unsuccessful attempt in 1916 to restore the monarchy, the revolt of the generals which had thwarted it, as well as constant imperialist intervention and intrigue, resulted in a collapse of the authority of Government. The war-lords became a power in the countryside and began to dominate it. Before that time, prudence had restrained the landlords and the Government from raising their demands on the peasantry beyond the limits of endurance. But there were no limits for the war-lords. Everyone in the village was affected by their excessive demands, except for those of the big landlords who were in league with the war-lords.

Despite the continued extortions of the war-lords, no major peasant

movement arose to resist them until the various expeditions of the Revolutionary Army were under way. These expeditions smashed the power of the war-lords and their allies in the villages and the peasant uprisings began. The aims of the peasant movement which arose in 1926 went little beyond putting an end to the extortions by the war-lords and their local allies. "The peasants attack as their main targets the local bullies, bad gentry and lawless landlords, hitting in passing against patriarchal ideologies and institutions, corrupt officials in the cities and evil customs in the rural areas."[3] In those words Mao gave the gist of the achievements of the Hunan Movement of 1926–27, which he describes in some detail in his Report.

Of all the actions of the peasantry which Mao describes in his Report, the weakest are those described by him under the caption "Dealing Economic Blows Against Landlords." The central issue here, as we pointed out above, was that of reduction or indeed the abolition of the landlords' rent. Mao claims that the peasants' associations succeeded in preventing ***an increase*** in rent! Surely, in a revolutionary situation, there should have been no question of landlords even thinking of increasing the rents further. Mao then adds that ***after November*** the peasants had gone a step further to agitate for reduction in rent. But this was already ***after*** the autumn harvest when the year's rent had already been collected. At that late stage, even if a demand for rent reduction had been voiced by a few peasant organizers, it could have no immediate practical value. The fact that the peasants' associations had not yet begun to challenge the fundamental class positions of the landlords is also indicated by Mao's reference to the fact that many landlords were trying ***to join*** the peasants' associations! Again, there is a suggestion made by Mao in his original essay on "Analysis of the Various Classes of the Chinese Peasantry" that some of the small landowners could be "led toward the path of revolution."[4] What kind of "revolution" could that be? It is clear that the movement sought little more than to smash the power of the war-lords and their local allies, whose victims included, of course, the smaller landlords.

Landlords preserved not only their economic positions but also their armed forces. One of the achievements claimed for the peasant movement which Mao lists in his Report is the "Overthrowing of the Landlords' Armed Forces." But what we actually find under this caption is a tacit admission that, by and large, the landlords' militias continued to be in existence. What is said here is only that their armed forces had largely "capitulated" to the peasant associations and were "now upholding the interests of the peasants." It is only in respect of "a small number of reactionary landlords" that the Report says that such forces would be taken over from them and "reorganized into the house-to-house regular militia and placed under the new organs of local self-government under the political power of the peasantry." It is evident that the continued existence of the armed power of the landlords as well

as their hold over the sections of the peasantry directly dependent on them economically, viz. the sharecroppers, etc., prevented the peasant movement from becoming a peasant revolution and brought about its subsequent collapse.

In the Hunan Report, Mao emphasizes repeatedly that both the leadership and the main force of the movement came from the poor peasantry. If the poor peasants had in fact provided both the leadership and the main force of the movement, it is inconceivable that their demands, viz. the reduction and the abolition of rent, would not have come to the forefront of the struggle. After all, that would not have antagonized the middle peasantry; indeed it would have found support amongst them. And the landlords were only **0.7** per cent of the rural population. In fact it was their economic power and their hold precisely over the poor peasantry which gave them power in the countryside. The demands which were put forward in the peasants' movement were those which affected the middle peasants far more than the poor peasants. The landlords, while exploiting the tenants to the limit, adopted a paternal attitude towards them and even afforded them some protection against extortions by third parties such as war-lords and the tax men. On the other hand, the independent small-holders, the middle peasants, stood exposed and weak, and were the principal victims of the war-lords and the tax men. More than the poor peasants, the middle peasants had a surplus of income which could be squeezed out, which marked them out as the more likely victims of extortion.

In fact, when Mao uses the term "poor peasant" in the Hunan Report, he redefines it in such a way as to include middle peasants also under that label. The original eleven categories of the rural population which he had described in his January **1926** article were, in the Hunan Report, compressed into three categories. But in doing so he included along with the sections of the peasantry directly exploited by the landlords a section of the independent small-holders, the middle peasants, also. He says in the Hunan Report that the poor peasants were **70** per cent of the peasantry. This figure could be arrived at only by taking the following categories, as described by Mao earlier, together: ***(a)*** farm labourers, 2 per cent; ***(b)*** poor peasants, **19** per cent; **(c)** sharecroppers, **19** per cent; *(d)* semi-landholders, **16** per cent; and ***(e)*** the poorer section of the independent peasant small-holders, **15** per cent. Indeed, only the first three categories are properly called poor peasants. The category *(d)* semi-landholders are an intermediate category, for their landholdings were too small for an independent livelihood and they had to depend on other sources to supplement their income. Peasants in the last category were middle peasants and not poor peasants.

Mao's redefinition of the term poor peasants is only implicit in his altered statistics; he does not describe his new categories in any detail. But by including a section of the middle peasants under the label of poor peasants he gave at least a formal validity to his statement that

the leadership and the main force of the Movement came from the poor peasants. But this only confuses the issue. This is only a spurious confirmation of his earlier prediction that the poor peasants were the most revolutionary. This action is understandable only if we consider the fact that such a characterization of the Movement made it acceptable in the terms of the Comintern (Stalinist) orthodoxy which called for an alliance of the proletariat and the poor peasantry. The Report was written in the heat of party controversy and evidently Mao was more preoccupied with the task of swinging party opinion on the subject than with formal niceties. Unfortunately the supposed militancy and the leadership said to have been shown by the poor peasantry in the Hunan Movement has been made into a myth which glosses over the actual practice of the Chinese communists and, indeed, Mao's own many statements in later years which contradict it. If anything is to be learnt from the Chinese revolution, we must turn away from this myth.

The poor peasantry were mobilized only after a new phase of the Chinese revolution opened with the establishment of a Red base in the Chingkang mountains, after the successful counter-revolution led by Chiang Kai-shek in 1927 which had forced the Communists to take refuge there. Under the umbrella of Red power, albeit in a very small area, the peasant revolution went a step forward. In the light of his new experience Mao came to the conclusion that "Positive action is taken in the village against the intermediate class (i.e. small landowners) only at a time of real revolutionary upsurge, when, for instance, political power has been seized in one or several counties, ***the reactionary army has been defeated a number of times, and the prowess of the Red Army has been repeatedly demonstrated.***" (Emphasis added.) Echoes of Lenin, of 1920!

The creation of the Red Army was a decisive factor in the new situation. The Red Army did not, however, arise just spontaneously out of the peasant movement, although its intimate relationship with the peasantry gave it its special character. The nucleus of the Red Army came from sections of the Kuomintang Revolutionary Army which had come over to the communist side after the counter-revolution. Thus relatively trained and experienced, and politically educated, fighting units provided an essential core of the Red Army. One might contrast their situation with that of the armed forces of the Telengana communists in India who were suppressed, after some brave fighting no doubt, but with greater ease, by the Indian forces (who took three years to do it, though). The Chinese Red Army was able to fight back far greater forces deployed against them.

Another factor which made possible the creation and the building up of the Red Army in China was that armed conflict had been endemic in China at least for a decade. In most villages armed units existed, although they were controlled by the landlords. Their importance and character is indicated by Yang, a social anthropologist, in his descrip-

tion of a Chinese village. "The first village-wide organization (was) the village defence programme. . . . Wealthy families (were) expected to equip themselves with rifles. . . etc. . . . The very poor (were) asked for nothing except that they behave themselves and obey the defence regulations."[83] Although the village self-defence units were controlled by landlords, they had accustomed the peasants to the idea of arming themselves. Many of the village militias could also be taken out of the power of the landlords and absorbed in the Red Army. Moreover, the Red Army fitted easily into the rural set-up. The people were accustomed to bear the burdens of maintaining armies—and the burden of the Red Army fell lightly on their shoulders. It had created conditions for the emancipation of the peasantry from extreme exploitation and it drew its tribute from the exploiters rather than the exploited.

Finally, a factor of no mean importance, was the collapse of central authority, which could not act immediately and swiftly to destroy the nucleus of the Red Army. When the blows finally came, backed with all the might and the resources of imperialism, the Red Army not only survived but was eventually victorious largely because of the existence of mass movements and the active support of the people. The actions of the proletariat in the areas under Chiang Kai-shek which impeded and sometimes disorganized his machinery of repression, were also, no doubt, of great value.

From the nucleus of the Red base in the Chingkang mountains the revolution developed. With all its vicissitudes, it extended and deepened until it had transformed the whole of China. The progress of the revolution and the precise content of the agrarian changes at its different stages, is a long and complex story which we could hardly attempt to survey in these pages.[84] But one crucial aspect of it needs to be noted: the land reform was implemented by peasant committees and not by a communist bureaucracy. Thus the implementation of the land reform varied at different times and at different places; it reflected the unevenness in the growth of the revolutionary consciousness and organization of the peasantry over the different areas of the country as well as changes in the overall strategy of the Communist Party which were determined by a number of factors, one of which was the rate at which the revolutionary movement was going forward. More than the changing content of the land reform at different stages, what interests us particularly is the actual process by which it was carried out.

The success of Mao and the Chinese communists in bringing about a revolutionary mobilization of the peasantry lay in their subtly dialectical understanding of the respective rôles of the middle peasants and the poor peasants. The task before them was to raise the level of revolutionary consciousness of the poor peasantry, a task which called for skill as well as much devoted effort. This was necessary precisely because the poor peasants were initially the more backward section but, at the same time, potentially the more revolutionary section of the

peasantry. On the other hand, Mao and his comrades had to take full account of the fact that it was the middle peasant who was initially the more militant and his energies had to be mobilized fully in carrying forward the initial thrust of the agrarian revolution. But, precisely because the middle peasants were not a revolutionary class, while fully utilizing their energies, and without antagonizing them, the revolutionary initiative had to be maintained independently of them; an initiative which was to be carried forward at a second stage of the agrarian revolution by the newly aroused poor peasants. Mao and his comrades showed, in practice, a masterly understanding of this dialectic. But in some of Mao's formal texts it seems to be missing altogether. The poor peasant is depicted to be spontaneously and unconditionally playing a revolutionary rôle; a picture which obscures the crucial rôle of the Communist Party, as a party with a proletarian revolutionary perspective, and the Red Army which broke the existing structure of power in the village, which prevented the Chinese revolution from degenerating into an ineffective peasant uprising.

It was during the period 1950–53, with the consolidation of communist rule, that a major wave of land reform set in motion a new dynamic in the rural society of China and transformed the face of the countryside. On the eve of this final phase, "The Agrarian Reform Law" and related regulations were promulgated which embodied the lessons learnt in the struggle. These were explained in a Report of Liu Shao-chi.[34] While laying a correct emphasis on the need to mobilize the poor peasants, one can see here a concern to make the party cadres appreciate the rôle of the middle peasants, especially at an early stage of the proceedings. The importance that was attached to the middle peasant was made even more clear in the speech of Teng Tse-hui, Director of Rural Work of the CCP, given at the Eighth Congress of the CCP in 1956. He said: "If we had confined our attention to relying on the poor peasants and neglected to unite with the middle peasants, if we had not firmly protected the interests of the middle peasants during the land reform. . . or, if we had not made efforts to draw the representative figures among the middle peasants into the leadership of the peasants' associations and co-operatives, ***then our Party as well as the poor peasants would have been isolated. . . .***"[35] (Emphasis added.) A mere recognition of the rôle of the middle peasants, drawing them initially into the leadership of the peasants' associations and fulfilling some of their immediate demands, might not in itself have enabled the agrarian movement to develop further and enter the next stage, the stage of the proletarian revolution. The success of the Chinese agrarian policy lay precisely in their following a dialectical strategy, ensuring at each stage that conditions were created for a further advance to the next stage.

The actual process by which this was achieved is described very vividly in two studies by social anthropologists,[36] whose findings

corroborate each other and are in turn corroborated by the general conclusions drawn by Teng Tse-hui in his speech quoted above. One of the two studies is by David and Isabel Crook who are pro-communist Anglo-Saxons who work in China. The other is by an anti-communist Chinese, C. K. Yang, who works in the U.S.A. Yang gives a picture of a village newly liberated by the Red Army: "Their first task was to 'set the masses in motion' in order to develop a situation of 'class struggle,' the basic step being to select 'active elements' amongst the peasants to serve as a core for the organization of the peasants' association and the new 'people's militia.' " Yang shows that middle peasants were initially selected to head the peasants' association and the militia "primarily because they had been active in village affairs." He argues, however, that: "The selection of these (middle peasants) to lead the vital new peasants' association primarily on the basis of their active part in village affairs appeared to deviate from the official communist policy of using only elements from the poor peasants and agricultural labourers as the core of the new village leadership." But this is precisely where Yang betrays his lack of understanding of communist policy. It would have been all too easy for the local party officials to nominate individual poor peasants to these posts and to issue directives in their name. But that would not have brought into being a vigorous peasant movement in which the poor peasants *as a class* could play an active rôle. Precisely for this reason the regional and local authorities in China were under orders on no account to carry out land distribution by force or by mere orders but only in accordance with the decisions of the peasants in each village and in conformity with local conditions. After peasant associations had been established, initially under middle-peasant leadership, Communist Party cadres encouraged poor peasants to press their demands, both through their representatives on the peasant associations as well as collectively through demonstrations, such as one described by Yang, when "noisy angry peasants appeared at the door" of the middle peasant head of the association with their demands. It was by this process that the level of consciousness of the poor peasants was raised to a point when they could take the initiatives in local government. But for that the peasants' associations might have degenerated into merely an extension of the bureaucratic apparatus. A vital fact remains, however. The energies of the poor peasants were released only after the landlords and the rich peasants had been isolated (which happened as a result of the coming of the Red Army and the communist leadership) and finally eliminated *as a class* as a result of the land reform. Only when that was achieved was a new stage in the local struggle opened up; only then did the poor peasant leadership acquire a new perspective and a new confidence and began to come forward to displace the middle peasants. This process is the vital process which transformed the agrarian upheaval in China into a proletarian revolution. It would not have come into being from its agrarian bases but for the

crucial rôle played by the Red Army and the Chinese Communist Party. Unfortunately, the mythology about the revolutionary leadership which the poor peasant is supposed to have shown right from the beginning obscures this most important feature of the Chinese revolution. This, as we have seen, was made possible by the special conditions of the Chinese revolution and, especially, the creation of the Red Army. In India, on the other hand, we find that even those peasant uprisings in which, for a variety of reasons, the poor peasant had played an important part, could not develop into a proletarian revolution.

IV

The situation in India, at the turn of the century, was different from that of China. In India, inter-imperialist rivalry had long ended with the supremacy of the British. No war-lords or private armies roamed around the Indian countryside. The rising nationalist movement, with its modest constitutional aims, did not seek to arm itself as Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintang had done. Until the nineteen-twenties the nationalist movement stood isolated from the potent forces of the peasantry although there had been much peasant unrest and occasional uprisings. Nor was there that crucial contact between the Indian nationalists and the Soviet Union, which played such an important rôle in China, although the Russian revolution had made a big intellectual impact on the minds of many young nationalists such as Nehru.

The radicalization of the nationalist movement in India just before and especially after the First World War, increasingly began to draw the masses into the movement. Gandhi, above all, who emulated the simple life of the peasant and spoke his language and engaged in symbolic activities which captivated the peasants' imagination, played a vital rôle in mobilizing peasant support for the Indian National Congress. But if he made the peasant speak for the Congress he did little to make the Congress speak for the peasant. When in 1921, during the first Civil Disobedience Movement, the peasant began to extend the struggle against British Imperialism to fight also the landlord and the money-lender, Gandhi invoked the principle of non-violence to call an abrupt halt to the movement. He was not prepared to go farther than to back, at certain times, a call to the peasantry to refuse to pay taxes; a slogan which evaded the issue of class exploitation in the village but was strong enough to rouse the peasantry. But, above all, his most powerful appeal to the peasantry was through the millenial concept of "Ram Rajya" (i.e. God's Kingdom) which would be established in India after the expulsion of the British.

Gandhi's accent on the peasantry in his political language did, however, lead many middle-class intellectuals to "go to the people," very much in the spirit of Russian populism. The effect of this is described by Nehru: "He sent us to the villages and the countryside hummed with

the activity of innumerable messengers of a new gospel of action. The peasant was shaken up and he began to emerge from his quiescent shell. The effect on us was different, but equally far reaching, for we saw for the first time, as it were, the villager. . . . We learnt. . . .

The growth of an urban working-class movement, the new involvement with the peasantry, the ferment of new ideas, especially the impact of the Russian revolution, and the disillusionment with the Congress after Gandhi's decision to halt the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1921 and of 1930, each time precisely when the movement was gathering momentum, caused many middle-class intellectuals to shift leftwards in their outlook. In 1934 the Congress Socialist Party was constituted inside the parent organization. Several streams of ideas had influenced the young socialists; but in its early stages the influence of Marxist thinking was strong. Although the socialists had begun to take an interest in the problems of the peasantry they concentrated on fighting within the Congress for a recognition of peasant demands rather than on mobilizing the peasants themselves to fight for their demands. Isolated peasant struggles did, however, rise from their local roots, and some assumed a major importance. But little progress had yet been made to build up a class organization of the peasantry.

The Communist Party of India (a unified Party began to take shape only in the 'thirties) had, in the 'twenties, concentrated mainly on organizing the industrial working class. The peasant upheavals of the 'twenties did not produce a fresh orientation as in China. During the Civil Disobedience Movement of the 'thirties, when it could have developed peasant struggles, the Communist Party found itself crippled and isolated both by the fact that its main leadership was in prison, following the Meerut Conspiracy Case, and also because the Comintern line, at the time, did not permit its participation in a movement led by the Indian bourgeoisie. Thus very little work-was done by them amongst the peasantry precisely at a time when it was in a ferment because of the economic crisis of the 'thirties and also the impact of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

In 1936 the Congress Socialist Party decided to admit communists to membership of the CSP. The coming together of the Left forces was the background to the setting up in 1936 of the All India *Kisan* Congress, which was later renamed the All India *Kisan Sabha* (i.e. Peasant Congress). Two other groups of peasant leadership also joined and later contended along with the socialists and the communists in the AIKS. These two groups as well as the socialists spoke in effect for the rich peasant and the middle peasant, and eschewed struggle for the special demands of the poor peasants. Thus Professor Ranga, one of their leaders, spoke of a "common front to be put up by both the landed and landless *kisans*" and the "common suffering of all classes of the rural public." Socialist Acharya Narendra Deva made this even more explicit in his Presidential address at the AIKS Conference

in 1938. He said: "Our task today is to carry the whole peasantry with us. . . . If romantic conceptions were to shape our resolves and prompt our actions, we would aspire to organize first the agricultural labourer and the semi-proletariat of the village, the most oppressed and exploited rural class . . . but if we do so . . . the peasant in the mass would, in that case, remain aloof from the anti-imperialist struggle."[1] If, for the socialists in the 1930s the postponement of the struggle for the poor peasants was a matter of political expediency, because of the primacy, as they understood it, of the anti-imperialist struggle, now the ideologues of Indian socialism have abandoned the struggle for the poor peasant altogether. Thus, Asoka Mehta, until recently the Chairman of the Praja Socialist Party (the heir of the Congress Socialist Party) and its most influential ideologue, wrote: "Should the socialists. as the communists are wont to do wherever they are in power, foment class conflict in villages even after landlordism is removed and use the wide array of tactics developed from Lenin to Mao Tse-tung to use one section against the other ? . . . If that is the line chosen, democratic rights and socialist values cannot survive. Then must come the whole complex of communist paraphernalia: people's courts, liquidation of kulaks, forced levies and the attendant violence. The other alternative is to help the village to recover its community, solidarity and foster autonomy of the village community. . . . The organic needs of village community cannot be met by sharpening class conflicts or party rivalries."[2] Such an outlook acquiesces in and perpetuates the exploitation of the poor peasant by the rich peasant.

The Communists, on the other hand, did speak of setting up a separate organization of agricultural labourers and, in the *kisan sabhas* (peasant associations) they put a special emphasis on the organization of the poor peasantry. But, in practice, several factors stood in their way. Firstly, after the middle 'thirties they were guided by the "popular front" line of the Comintern and were not inclined to force the issue with their colleagues in the AIKS. Secondly, Indian Communists took an essentially "Menshevik" view of the revolutionary perspective in India. In the Joint Statement of Eighteen Communist Leaders issued at the time of the "Meerut Trial," which has been described as one of the most important documents of Communist policy, it was argued that because of an insufficiently developed industrial base an indefinite period would elapse between the "bourgeois-democratic revolution" and the "socialist revolution" in India. In effect this meant that the task of organizing the rural proletariat and the poor peasants did not have any special urgency for them. Finally, the Communists, like the others, had simply to face the fact that the poor peasantry, desperately exploited and literally starving, was, nevertheless, too strongly dominated by their masters to be able to emerge as an independent force. Thus the main direction of Communist practice also was similar to that of the Socialists and their other colleagues in the *Kisan Sahha.* They concentrated on

agitation for broad peasant demands, especially for security of tenure, debt relief, and cheaper credit facilities, etc., and sought to influence Government policy rather than to bring about direct peasant action. This tradition largely continues to this day. But the Communists did lead many local struggles and two major uprisings of the peasantry though both had a regional character.

Towards the end of the war and in the early post-war years, two outstanding peasant movements arose, which were led by the Communists, in both of which the poor peasant came to play an important rôle. The available published material about these movements is a little inadequate for one to base a definite analysis. But one can see several unique factors in each case which may go some way to explain why these movements, which fall outside the normal pattern, arose at all. The first of these was the ***Tebhaga*** Movement, which arose in what is now East Pakistan. ***Tebhaga,*** the slogan of the movement, was the demand for the reduction of the share of the proprietor from one-half of the crop to one-third. It may be added that the ***jotedars,*** the proprietors of the land, were in fact "occupancy tenants" (with transferable and heritable rights in the land) who paid a fixed-money rent to the Zemindars, the great landlords. Over the years the fixed-money rent paid to the landlords had become a relatively small part of the value of the crop. Thus it was the ***jotedars*** who appropriated the largest share of the crop. Their land was cultivated by ***adhiars*** or ***bhargadars*** who were the sharecroppers. The ***Tebhaga*** Movement had been preceded some years earlier by the great Bengal famine of 1943 in which three and a half million peasants had perished. In an account of the ***Tebhaga*** Movement, Bhowani Sen, who had led it, was struck by the difference in the peasants' behaviour at the time of the great famine of 1943, when millions of peasants had died without a struggle, and their militancy and courage in later years.[43] But he did not attempt, in the article quoted, to explain why this was so, except for the comment that "the intolerable conditions of the ***adhiars*** (the sharecroppers) awakened them to a new sense of solidarity." But the conditions could not have been more intolerable than they were in 1943. The ***Tebhaga*** Movement, officially, did not start until 1946. In fact the movement had been gathering momentum in 1945.[44] Local Communist and ***Kisan Sabha*** cadres participated in it but the Communist Party did not put its full weight into the movement until the end of the war with Japan. When they did so in 1946 the movement went forward with tremendous force.

Although the great famine found the peasantry unprepared and unable to rise against profiteers and hoarders of food (much of the food having already vanished into the cities or military stocks), many of the unique features of subsequent years, which helped the rise of the ***Tebhaga*** Movement, arose as a consequence of the famine. Firstly, the weak peasant organizations were disrupted and disorganized by the

overwhelming calamity of the famine. The Bengal peasant, used to semi-starvation, was just helpless in the face of the disaster, and evidently proved too weak to fight back. When the ***Kisan Sabha*** units had recovered from the initial blow, they were quickly drawn into famine relief work. It was only in the following years that a new determination gave impetus to their organization. Secondly, large numbers of students and persons from the educated middle classes were drawn into the voluntary relief work during the famine and into large-scale medical relief in the following year. This brought about a new contact between the peasantry and educated youth which provided social education for them both. This was a very important factor in creating new cadres for the Communist Party and the ***Kisan Sabha.*** Thirdly, a factor of vital importance was that following the famine the ***Kisan Sabha*** renewed its drive against hoarders and blackmarketeers of food with fresh vigour. Now its hands were stronger because the authorities too began to view the activities of the hoarders with a fresh concern, because of the magnitude of the famine as well as the fact that in the spring and summer of 1944 the Japanese had invaded Assam and parts of East Bengal. The ***jotedars,*** rich peasants, who had the food to hoard and sell on the black market, could no longer count on the connivance of the authorities. The power of the ***jotedar*** was, thus, seen by the peasant to crumble in the face of the ***Kisan Sabha*** leadership, which gave the peasant a new confidence in that leadership and in the possibility of fighting back against the ***jotedars.*** An additional factor was that some tribal people, such as the Hajangs of North Mymensingh, who have a long tradition of militant struggle, participated in the movement. Finally, but not least, there was a change in the economic bargaining power of the sharecropper due to two factors. During the famine more sharecroppers had died than any other class because they had the least reserves with which to get through the famine. Apart from the millions who died, large numbers of them had drifted to the towns and cities to find jobs or to beg for food, and did not come back. The reduction in their numbers created a relative shortage of labour. Furthermore, the invasion of Assam and parts of East Bengal by the Japanese and the consequent military operations in the area, also opened up alternative avenues for employment for the sharecroppers. These factors greatly strengthened their economic bargaining position ***vis-à-vis*** the ***jotedars.*** The sharecroppers' economic dependence on the ***jotedars*** was weakened.

The crucial battles of the ***Tebhaga*** Movement were fought at harvest-time. But the fight did not always end there because the sharecroppers had to resist the attempts by ***jotedars,*** with the support of the police, to deprive them of their gains. This continuing struggle was led by peasant committees which became a power in the villages. They began to administer the affairs of the village and to administer justice. The Muslim League Government of Bengal which had, on the one hand,

carried out repression of the movement, introduced, on the other hand, a bill in January 1947 to legalize the two-thirds share of the share-cropper. But the bill did not become law. The ***jotedars,*** through both Congress and Muslim League politicians, fought back.

By the summer of 1947, however, the movement collapsed. Bhowani Sen, the leader of the movement, asked the peasants not to launch direct action that year because after independence the new Governments of Pakistan and India were to be given the opportunity to fulfil their promises to the people. It was clear that these promises would not be fulfilled by them. Bhowani Sen's call merely formalized the fact that the ***Tebhaga*** Movement, which he had described as "one of the biggest mass movements of our time," had come to an end.

In the article quoted above, Bhowani Sen, with much candour and political courage, lists the "Main Failings of the Leadership." In his self-criticism he argues that the movement failed because it did not win the support of the "middle class" and the working class. Working-class "support" could have been little more than a gesture of solidarity, for its size in the area in which the movement arose was insignificant. As regards the "middle class" Bhowani Sen writes: "Many of them are poor and petty ***jotedars*** who, while they recognize that the system is bad, feel that they would be done for if the system is liquidated without at the same time opening other avenues for their employment. . . . We should have advised the ***adhiars*** (sharecroppers) to exempt petty ***jotedars*** from the operation of ***Tebhaga*** and concentrated against the richest and the biggest." As it stands, this argument is somewhat unrealistic. What Sen says about the plight of the small ***jotedar*** is only too true. But if the movement had been strong enough to force the biggest ***jotedars*** to accept a one-third share of the crop, it would have been very difficult indeed to dissuade the sharecroppers who tilled the lands of small ***jotedars*** from demanding the same. However, Bhowani Sen's argument does point to the narrow base of the movement which failed to generate slogans which could have drawn in the active participation of the middle peasants who had not been unsympathetic to the movement in so far as it had challenged the power of the landlords and the rich peasants. There were two major changes in the situation also, which made it no longer possible for the ***Tebhaga*** Movement to continue. Firstly, with the end of the war with Japan, the authorities were no longer interested in supporting the anti-hoarding drives which had weakened and demoralized the ***jotedars.*** Now the full force of the Government's machinery of repression was turned on the poor peasant. With its limited class base in the village, the movement was not able to fight back effectively. Secondly, a deciding factor in the situation was that whereas the peasantry in the area in which the ***Tebhaga*** Movement arose, both the ***jotedars*** as well as the sharecroppers, were mostly Muslim, the cadres of the Communist Party and, of the ***Tebhaga*** Movement were mostly Hindu. With the approach of independence, the

full force of Muslim nationalism was sweeping through Bengal, as through other areas with a Muslim majority in India. This tended to isolate the Hindu cadres. With the establishment of Pakistan, most of the Hindu cadres went over to India and the movement was virtually decapitated. It is now twenty years since the ***Tebhaga*** struggle had begun. But nothing like it has arisen again in the areas in which it had been the most powerful.

The other great peasant uprising in India, since the war, was the ***Telengana*** Movement. In its character and political objectives it was the most revolutionary peasant movement that has yet arisen in India. The movement had begun rather modestly in 1946 in the Nalgonda district of Hyderabad State, which was ruled by the Nizam under British suzerainty. The movement then spread to the Warrangal and Bidar districts of the State. The Hyderabad State was dominated by a backward, oppressive and ruthless aristocracy. The initial modest aims of the ***Telengana*** Movement reflected the broad demands of the whole of the peasantry against illegal and excessive exactions of the *Deshmukhs* and the ***Nawabs.*** One of the most powerful slogans of the movement was for writing off all peasant debts.

The repression let loose by the feudal lords and their governments was met by armed resistance by the peasantry. The movement then entered a new revolutionary stage. Local Communists had participated in the movement vigorously, although it did not receive the official sanction of the Communist leadership until later. By the time of the Second Congress of the CPI in March 1948 the ***Telengana*** Movement had already entered its revolutionary phase and was one of the factors which influenced the leftward swing in the Communist Party line at the Congress.

By 1947 the ***Telengana*** Movement had a guerilla army of about 5,000. The peasants killed or drove out the landlords and the local bureaucrats and seized and redistributed the land. They established governments of peasant "soviets" which were integrated regionally into a central organization. Peasant rule was established in an area of 15,000 square miles with a population of four million. The government of the armed peasantry continued until 1950; it was not finally crushed until the following year. Today the area remains one of the political strongholds of the Communist Party.

There are several special factors in the Telengana situation which at the time favoured the rise of a militant peasant movement and its subsequent transformation into a revolutionary movement. Firstly, the political situation in Telengana in 1946 provided the right political climate for such a movement. With the independence of India in sight the future of the Hyderabad State, and its place in the Indian Union, became a dominant political issue in the State. The nationalist movements in the sub-continent of India had looked to the eventual absorp-

tion of the "princely states" in free India or Pakistan, as the case may be. Hyderabad was the largest and the richest of them all. The majority of the population, which was Hindu, as well as its geography, favoured Hyderabad's union with India. The feudal aristocracy, both Hindu as well as Muslim, favoured the idea of an independent Hyderabad. So did the small Muslim middle class in the State which had enjoyed a favoured position there and had fears about its future in the Indian Union; they organized armed bands, called *Razakars*, to fight for an independent Hyderabad under the Nizam. Kasim Rizvi, the leader of the ***Razakars*** was looked down upon by the feudal lords, who considered him to be an upstart. But they used the ***Razakars*** against the peasants when the *Telengana* Movement arose. The leadership of the ***Telengana*** Movement, in its first stages, had supported the idea of Hyderabad's union with India; the Nizam's rule and the idea of an independent Hyderabad were identified with the feudal aristocracy of the State. The peasant movement, at that stage, thus drew great strength from the nationalist upsurge in the State. But later, when union with India seemed to be inevitable and it became clear that the Government of India would deploy far larger and more effective forces against them, the ***Telengana*** leadership, in panic, switched their political allegiance to the support of the Nizam and the demand for an independent Hyderabad. The Communist Party in Hyderabad was legalized for the first time and Communists and ***Razakars*** fought together against Indian troops. Now the movement was aligned with forces which it had fought in the past and it was running counter to the nationalist movement. This created a great deal of political confusion and split the Communist leadership of the movement. Nationalist sentiment, which was a powerful factor in the rise of the ***Telengana*** Movement, thus became an important factor leading to its eventual downfall. Secondly, the movement was initially successful because the feudal aristocracy was rather demoralized by the fact that union with India seemed inevitable, despite its desperate bid for autonomy. Moreover, the State apparatus was corrupt and inefficient. On the other hand there was general political unrest. The peasant movement, directed against the ruling aristocracy, drew much popular support and was able to withstand repression. But later it was confronted with a more powerful army of India and it also lost popular support. Thirdly, the movement developed its initial momentum from the fact that its demands were broad-based and it drew in the middle peasant as well as the poor peasant. Later on, when the peasant "Soviets" were set up and land was redistributed, conflicts of interest between different sections of the peasantry came to the surface. Some Communists argue that this was a hasty and ill thought out policy which the ***Telengana*** leadership sought to impose from above, instead of preparing the ground carefully and helping the peasantry to advance the movement from below. The disruption of their peasant base proved disastrous when they were

under heavy military attack. Fourthly, amongst the special factors which favoured the rise of the ***Telengana*** Movement are those which favoured the guerrila struggle. Telengana is a very poor country, much of it covered by thorny scrub and jungle, interspersed with relatively more prosperous settlements in a few favoured basins with tank irrigation. It has also a substantial tribal population, amongst whom there is a greater sense of solidarity and a fighting spirit, than amongst stratified peasant societies such as exist in richer areas. Thus, when an attempt was made in 1948 to extend the Movement to the neighbouring rich delta region of Andhra, it failed. However, it should be added that this failure was due also to the fact that by that time the Movement had moved away from its broad slogans and had become "sectarian" and thus failed to draw the support of the middle peasant. By that time the Movement was also running counter to the nationalist sentiment on the Hyderabad issue.

The ***Tebhaga*** and the ***Telengana*** Movements had both risen from their local roots rather than from any initiatives of the Communist Party, although in both the Communists provided the leadership and played a vital rôle. After the Communist Party Congress of 1948 the Party was committed to launch insurrectionary forms of struggle. But it was not able to organize any movement on the scale of ***Tebhaga*** or the ***Telengana*** Movement. Between 1948 and 1952 the Communist Party was banned in many States. On the peasant front, as on other fronts, the party workers were subjected to severe repression. Most AIKS workers were either in jail or underground during this period and the organization virtually ceased to function. Despite this, local peasant unrest continued to manifest itself throughout India. But it remained localized and limited in scope. It was clear that peasant insurrections could not be launched merely by Party decisions, but required certain pre conditions to exist before they could develop.

In the period which followed 1952 the ***Kisan Sabha*** and the Communist Party moved away from the idea of direct peasant action, except for demonstrations and agitation. They have put the emphasis, instead, on exerting pressure on the Congress Government for implementing effective land reform and on parliamentary political struggle for the Communist Party, which if brought to power would carry out a drastic land reform. At the Congress of the Communist Party in 1958 at Amritsar, the Party adopted the "peaceful road to socialism," and at the Congress in 1961 at Vijaywada it put forward the concept of ***"National Democracy*** as the most suitable form to solve the problems of national regeneration and social progress ***along the non-capitalist path*** of development." Thus they now seek to replace the present Government of ***"bourgeois-democracy*** in which the leadership of the national bourgeoisie is decisive" by a government of national democracy which is to be distinguished also from ***"people's democracy*** in which the leadership of the working class is decisive, that leadership having won

the support of the overwhelming majority of the people." National Democracy is distinguished from these two other concepts by the fact that in it "the proletariat shares power with the national bourgeoisie."[46] This conception does not appear to be very different from that of the Praja Socialist Party which is also prepared to share power with the Congress, in the hope of consolidating its left wing. The fundamental differences between the Praja Socialist Party and the Communists now seem to lie almost entirely in the field of international relations rather than domestic policy[47]*. The effect of this realignment of political forces has been to limit the peasant movement to agitation about Government policies instead of undertaking any direct action.

Both the Communists and the Socialists are largely in agreement with the principles of land reform which have been adopted by the Congress. Their main criticism is directed at the manner of its implementation which defeats the objectives of the land reform. The Report of the Congress Land Reform Committee which was published in 1949 is a radical document. It took as its guiding principles the elimination of exploitation and giving the land back to the tiller. It sought to establish independent peasant landholdings and from that basis to develop a co-operative system of agriculture. That document, however, reflected the views of the Congress left wing rather than that of the main body of the Congress, much less the views of the various State Governments which were to undertake the land reforms. The character of the land reforms, as implemented rather unevenly in the various States over the last decade, is very different indeed from the recommendations of the Agrarian Reforms Committee. The actual result of the land reform is the subject of some controversy. The Chinese view[47] is that it has "abolished only the ***political privileges*** of some of the local feudal princes and ***zamindari (tax farming) privileges*** of some landlords," but that "the Indian feudal land system as a whole has been preserved." Such a view underestimates the profound changes which have in fact taken place in the Indian agrarian economy over the last decade. Land reform in the different States of India has, to varying degrees, eliminated or limited exploitation by non-cultivating landlords and encouraged the growth of capitalist farming. The changes in the different States are too numerous and complex to permit an attempt to present them here even in outline. Moreover, although numerous studies have examined the changes in detail an over-all statistical picture of the present situation is still not available. (In the Third Five Year Plan, published in 1961, it was stated that a Report on the progress of land reforms was under preparation, but evidently it has not yet been published.) A few data may, however, help us to form a rough picture of the situation. Sulekh Gupta points to the fact that (in 1953–54) 75 per cent of the peasant households operated holdings of less than 5 acres. On the other hand 65 per cent of the land was farmed by 13 per cent of the households; of the latter, at the top, 3.6 per cent of

the households possessed 36 per cent of the land.[48] Gupta points to the increasing disparity between the growing prosperity of capitalist agriculture and the stagnation and bankruptcy of the small peasant economy in which the vast mass of the peasantry live in increasing poverty. Gupta, perhaps, over-estimates the extent of the capitalist sector. This picture is qualified by Bhowani Sen, who, while recognizing the trend towards the growth of the capitalist sector, also points out that "the ***upper limit*** of employment in India's capitalist cultivation is 16 per cent of the rural labour force (40 per cent of the agricultural workers — the rural proletariat)."[49] The many survivals of the old system are pointed out by Sen and also by Kotovsky and Daniel Thorner,[50] whose works provide a very useful survey of the land reforms. The existence of the survivals of the old system are also indicated by the continued emphasis in official documents, such as the Mid Term Appraisal Report on the Third Five Year Plan, on such questions as the problems of tenancy reform, security of tenure, regulation of rents, etc.[51]

There are two aspects of the land reform which have a direct bearing on the question of political mobilization of the peasantry. Firstly, an upper stratum of tenants were able to acquire ownership of land and have become employers of labour. Kotovsky argues that "before the reforms, this stratum of tenants energetically advocated abolition of the ***zamindari*** system; it played an important rôle in the peasant movement. . . . After the reforms were put through it withdrew from active peasant movement."[52] Secondly, one of the principal results of the land reform has been mass eviction of tenants on an unprecedented scale by land owners taking over land for "self-cultivation." These peasants, deprived of their land and livelihood, might have been expected to become an explosive force in the countryside. The issue did in fact greatly agitate some local ***kisan sabhas*** and provoked some local demonstrations. But this burning issue did not develop into a militant movement. The peasants did not launch direct action to resist eviction. Indeed, during the period 1955–58, when the land reforms were in progress, "there was a temporary decline of the organized peasant movement."[53] In criticizing the Congress land reform the Communist Party has criticized its bureaucratic method of implementation which resulted in widespread evasion. The Party advocated instead the implementation of the land reform through peasant committees. But their appeal on this issue was evidently directed only towards the Congress Government because they took no steps to organize direct action by the peasants for the purpose.

The perspective that is being held out before the Indian peasantry today is one of "revolution from above" rather than "revolution from below." Although the Communist Party distinguishes between the "peaceful realization of the socialist revolution" from "the parliamentary way of the reformist conception," it is clear that their commitment to a constitutional struggle leaves them with few alternatives

of struggle beyond agitation to mobilize electoral support against the existing Congress Government. On the question of the ruling classes relinquishing power, the Communist Party takes the view that "everything will depend on whether the force of peaceful mass struggle, isolating the ruling classes, compels them to surrender or whether they hit back with their armed might. . . . The class aspect (of the struggle) consists in ***exposure*** of capitalism . . . ***showing how*** the class aspirations of the national bourgeoisie conflict with the national aspirations. . . ."[84] (Emphasis added.) As far as the peasant masses are concerned, however, the policy of agitation and "exposure" of the Congress Government has met with little success and has failed to mobilize a majority of peasant votes for the Left in the several elections that have been held in the decade and a half since independence. Nor has the agitational struggle generated a force which may isolate the ruling classes and compel them to surrender. This has been the situation, notwithstanding the fact that the Communist Party has launched, from time to time, massive demonstrations in town and country on such issues as rising prices and for tax relief. Thus, one of the most successful mass demonstations launched by the ***Kisan Sabha*** in recent years was the 1959 struggle in the Punjab against the "Betterment Levy," a tax which was levied on the enhanced value of land which has benefited from new irrigation. But if the ***kisan sabhas*** have had some success in launching such "mass struggles" they have had little success in launching any class struggles of the exploited peasantry. Moreover, success in such struggle, involving the entire peasantry, has not brought in its wake any substantial increase in electoral support. The reasons for this lie in certain power relationships which operate in the rural society and certain structural patterns of political behaviour of the peasantry which must be changed before any major advance can be expected in this direction.

The pattern of political behaviour of the peasantry is based on factions[85] which are vertically integrated segments of the rural society, dominated by landlords and rich peasants at the top and with poor peasants and landless labourers, who are economically dependent on them, at the bottom. Amongst the exploited sections of the peasantry there is little or no class solidarity. They stand divided amongst themselves by their allegiance to their factions, led by their masters. Political initiative thus rests with faction leaders, who are owners of land and have power and prestige in the village society. They are often engaged in political competition (even conflict) amongst themselves in pursuit of power and prestige in the society. The dominating factions, who by virtue of their wealth have the largest following, back the party in power and, in return receive many reciprocal benefits. The opposition finds allies, generally, in factions of middle peasants who are relatively independent of the landlords but who often find themselves in conflict with them. Many factors enter into the factional picture; kinship, neighbourhood ties (or conflicts) and caste alignments affect the

allegiance of particular peasants to one faction or another. But broadly, it does appear that in one group of factions the predominant characteristic is that of the relationship between masters and their dependants while other factions are predominantly those of the independent smallholders. The number of votes that the Left can hope to mobilize depends, in the main, not on the amount of agitation it conducts (although this must affect the situation partly) but on the relative balance of the factions. Above all, the decisive question here is that of winning over the votes of the large number of poor peasants and landless labourers who are still dominated by their masters. This cannot be done unless the factional structure is broken. For the allegiance of the poor peasants and the farm labourers to their masters is not merely due to subjective factors such as their "backward mentality," etc. It is based on the objective fact of their dependence on their masters for their continued livelihood. Thus, it seems hardly likely, in the absence of any direct action by the peasantry or by action by a government, which might break the economic power of the landlords and rich peasants, that an effective electoral support can be won by the Left. This is a paradox of the parliamentary way, and a dilemma for a Party which renounces direct action.

V

We have raised a number of questions in the above analysis. There is, however, one theme which runs through our discussion: the respective rôles of the middle peasants, the independent peasant smallholders, on the one hand, and the various categories of poor peasants on the other.

We have found that the poor peasants are, initially, the least militant class of the peasantry. Their initial backwardness is sometimes explained in purely subjective terms such as servile habits ingrained in the peasant mind over centuries or the backward mentality of the peasant, etc. But in fact we find that when certain conditions appear the peasants are liberated from such a servile mentality very quickly. Clearly, the subjective backwardness of the peasantry is rooted in objective factors. There is a fundamental difference between the situation of the poor peasant and that of the industrial worker. The latter enjoys a relative anonymity in his employment and job mobility which gives him much strength in conducting the class struggle. Even in the case of the industrial worker, where his relative independence is reduced by such devices as tied housing, etc., his militancy is also undermined. In the case of the poor peasant the situation is much more difficult. He finds himself and his family totally dependent upon his master for their livelihood. When the pressure of population is great as in India and China, no great machinery of coercion is needed by the landlords to keep him down. Economic competition suffices. The poor peasant is thankful to his master, as a benefactor who gives him land to cultivate as tenant

or gives him a job as labourer. He looks to his master for help in times of crisis. The master equally responds with a paternalistic attitude; he must keep alive the animal on whose labour he thrives. When in extreme and exceptional cases the exploitation and oppression is carried beyond the point of human endurance, the peasant may even be goaded into killing his master for his departure from the paternalistic norm. But he is still unable to rise, by himself, against the system itself. His dependence on the master thus undergoes a paternalistic mystification and he identifies himself with his master. But this backwardness of the peasantry, rooted as it is in objective dependence, is only a relative and not an absolute condition. In a revolutionary situation, when anti-landlord and anti-rich-peasant sentiment is built up by, say, the militancy of middle peasants, his morale is raised and he is more ready to respond to calls to action. His revolutionary energy is set in motion. When the objective pre-conditions are realized the poor peasant is a potentially revolutionary force. But the inherent weakness in his situation renders him more open to intimidation and setbacks can easily demoralize him. He finally and irrevocably takes the road to revolution only when he is shown in practice that the power of his master can be irrevocably broken and the possibility of an alternative mode of existance becomes real to him.

The middle peasants, on the other hand, are initially the most militant element of the peasantry, and they can be a powerful ally of the proletarian movement in the countryside, especially in generating the initial impetus of the peasant revolution. But their social perspective is limited by their class position. When the movement in the countryside advances to a revolutionary stage they may move away from the revolutionary movement unless their fears are allayed and they are drawn into a process of co-operative endeavour.

Our hypothesis, thus, reverses the sequence that is suggested in Maoist texts—although it is in accord with the Maoist practice! It is not the poor peasant who is initially the leading force, and the main force of the peasant revolution with the middle peasant coming in only later when the success of the movement is guaranteed, but precisely the reverse. Evidently, a correct understanding of this sequence and the nature of the conditions required to mobilize the poor peasants must be vital to the formulation of a correct strategy *vis-à-vis* the peasantry.

Finally, we would like to end by emphasizing once again that our conclusions are purely tentative and are intended to open up a discussion of the problems by raising several questions rather than suggesting cut-and-dried answers. The answers will no doubt be forthcoming from a fresh spirit of inquiry and, above all, from actual experience; and they will be proved by the success of those who lead the peasant struggle.

NOTES

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Damned* (Paris, 1963), p. 48.
2. V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works,* vol. I1 (Moscow, 1947), p. 457.
3. *ibid.,* p. 647.
4. Government of India, Planning Commission, *Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agrariarr Co-operatives* (New Delhi, 1957).
5. G. Adhikari, "The Problem of the Non-Capitalist Path of Development of India and the State of National Democracy," *World Marxist Review,* vol. VII, no. 11. November 1964.
6. George Lichtheim, *Marxism, a Historial and Critical Study* (London, 1961), p. 333.
7. Lenin, *op. cit.,* pp. 456–7.
8. For a fuller picture, readers should consult the following works: Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Moscow, 1956); G. T. Robinson, *Rural Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York, 1949); Sir John Maynard, *The Russian Peasant* (New York, 1962).
9. *Cf.* J. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Moscow, 1953), pp. 213–36.
10. Marx and Engels, Preface to the Russian Edition of the Communist Manifesto, *Selected Works* (London, 1950), vol. I, p. 24.
11. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1961), vol. IV, p. 424.
12. *ibid.,* vol. VI, p. 444.
13. Robinson, *op. cit.,* pp. 206–7.
14. Lenin, *Collected Works,* vol. IV, p. 427.
15. *Cf.* "The Agrarian Programme of Russian Social Democracy" and "Reply to Criticism of Our Draft Programme," *ibid.* vol. VI, pp. 109–50 and 438–53.
16. *ibid.,* vol. VIII, p. 231.
17. Robinson, *op. cit.,* p. 161.
18. Lenin, *Selected Works,* vol. II (Moscow, 1947), p. 37.
19. Sir John Maynard, *Russia in Flux* (New York, 1962), p. 332.
20. Lenin, *Selected Works,* vol. II, pp. 414–17.
21. *ibid.,* p. 647.
22. Jane Degras, *The Communist International—Documents* (London, 1960), vol. II, p. 336.
23. Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (London, 1963), p. 157.
24. Ho Kan Chih, A *History of the Modern Chinese Revolution* (Peking, 1959), p. 100.
25. The article included in the *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (London, 1955) under the title "Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society," and dated March 1926, is a revised and abridged version of two articles which appeared in Chung-kuo Nung-min in January and February 1926. Much of value in the original article has been lost in the revised version. Our references are to the translation of the original article as given by Stuart Schram in *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York, 1963), pp. 172–7.
26. I. Deutscher, "Maoism—Its Origins, Background and Outlook" in R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds.) *Socialist Register* 1964 (London, 1964), p. 19.
27. Schram, *op. cit.,* pp. 28 and 33.
28. Ho Kan Chih, *op. cit.,* p. 139.
29. The percentage figures of the various classes of the Chinese peasantry are derived from the data given by Mao Tse-tung in the original article referred to in note 25.
30. Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works* (London, 1955), p. 23.
31. Schram, *op. cit.,* p. 173.
32. *ibid.,* p. 88.
33. Martin C. Yang, *A Chinese Village* (London, 1947), p. 143.
34. See Chao Kuo-chun, *Agrarian Policy of the Chinese Communist Party* (London, 1960).

35. *The Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China* (Peking, 1950).
36. *Eighth National Congress of the CCP*, vol. III (Peking, 1956), pp. 182–3.
37. David and Isabel Crook, *Revolution in a Chinese Village* (London, 1959), and C. K. Yang, *A Chinese Village in Early Commrrnist Transition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959).
38. C. K. Yang, *op. cit.*, pp. 143–5.
39. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (London, 1956), p. 365.
40. N. G. Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants* (New Delhi, 1949). p. 89.
41. Acharya Narendra Deva, *Socialism and the National Revolution* (Bombay, 1946). pp. 46–7.
42. Asoka Mehta, *Studies in Asian Socialism* (Bombay, 1959), pp. 213–15.
43. Bhowani Sen, "The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal," *Communist*, vol. I, no. 3, September 1947, p. 121.
44. *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 124 f., also All India Kisan Sabha, *Draft Report for 194445* (Bombay, 1945), pp. 9–13.
45. Bhowani Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
46. G. Adhikari, "The Problem of the Non-Capitalist Path of Development of India and the State of National Democracy," *World Marxist Review*, vol. VII, no. 11, November 1964.
46A. The Communist Party of India has since split into two rival Communist Parties.
47. More on the Philosophy of Pandit Nehru, *People's Daily* (27 October 1962).
48. Sulekh Gupta, "New Trends of Growth in Indian Agriculture," *Seminar*, no. 38 (New Delhi, October 1962).
49. Bhowani Sen, *Evolution of Agrarian Relations in India* (New Delhi, 1962).
50. G. Kotovsky, *Agrarian Reforms in India* (New Delhi, 1964); Daniel Thorner. *The Agrarian Prospect in India* (Delhi, 1956), and *Land and Laborrr in India* (London, 1962).
51. Government of India, Planning Commission, *The Third Plan, Mid Term Appraisal* (Delhi, 1963).
52. Kotovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
53. *ibid.*, p. 82.
54. Adhikari, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
55. For reasons of space we are unable to enlarge on this question which deserves more attention than it has received so far on the Left. The following works may provide a useful introduction to this subject: Ralph Nicholas, "Village Factions and Political Parties in Rural West Bengal," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, vol. II, no. 1, November 1963; Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India* (Urbana, 1958), chapter IV; T. O. Beidelman, *A Comparative Analysis of the Jajmani System* (New York, 1959); Frederik Barth, *Political Leadership Among Swat Pathans* (London, 1959).