

The Peasant Question Revisited

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On the land question, Marx was much more concerned and acquainted with the greatest obstacle to the nationalisation of land in a country of peasant proprietorship. He addressed that, in its present state of peasant proprietorship, "it is certainly not the place where we must look for a solution of this great problem", although he himself spoke on the necessity and goal of the nationalisation of land in the long term period. As he observed unequivocally, "The ever-growing wants of the people on the one side, the ever increasing price of agricultural produce on the other, afford the irrefutable evidence that nationalisation of land has become a social necessity".

"Such a diminution of agricultural produce as springs from individual abuse, will, of course, become impossible whenever cultivation is carried on under the control and for the benefit of the nation", he declared.

Engels graphically put forward the peasant question stating that "possession of the means of production by the individual producers now-a-days no longer grants these producers real freedom" and "it is not the task of socialism to separate property from labour, but, on the contrary, to unite these two factors of all production by placing them in the same hands...the latter (property) in this general form is by no means the task of socialism. The latter's task is rather only to transfer the means of production to the producers as their common possession". In his words : "it becomes directly misleading in that it implies that it is the mission of socialism to convert the present sham property of the small peasant in his fields into real property, that is to say, to convert the small tenant into an owner and the indebted owner into a debtless owner. Undoubtedly, socialism is interested to see that the false semblance of peasant property should disappear, but not in this manner." Further, "We foresee the inevitable doom of the small peasant but that it is not our mission to hasten it by any interference on our part", and that "when we are in possession of state power we shall not even think of forcibly expropriating the small peasants (regardless of whether with or without compensation), as we shall have to do in the case of the big landowners. Our task relative to the small peasant consists, in the first place, in effecting a transition of his private enterprise and private possession to co-operative ones, not forcibly but by dint of example and the proffer of social assistance for this purpose. And then of course we shall have ample means of showing to the small peasant prospective advantages that must be obvious to him even today". He, without making any promise to preserve small peasant holding against the overwhelming power of capitalist production, further explained the socialists' theoretical position in simple words, "we of course are decidedly on the side of the small peasant; we shall do everything at all permissible to make his lot more bearable to facilitate his transition to the co-operative should he decide to do so and even to make it possible for him to remain on his small holding for a protracted length of time to think the matter over, should he still be unable to bring himself to this decision, we do this not only because we consider the small peasant living by his own labour as virtually belonging to us, but also in the direct interest of the party. The greater the number of peasants whom we save from

being actually hurled down into the proletariat, whom we can win to our side while they are still peasants, the more quickly and easily the social transformation will be accomplished, it will serve us naught to wait with this transformation until capitalist production has developed everywhere to its utmost consequences, until the last small handicraftsman and the last small peasant have fallen victim to capitalist large-scale production".

Engels wrote that the socialist workers' party of any country is not charged "with the task of taking into its fold, in addition to the rural proletarians and small peasants", also other classes of landowners. Considering the objective reality and practical aspect, he made a flexible approach to the critical issue in these words : "On certain questions we may make common cause with them and be able to fight side by side with them for definite aims, we can use in our party individuals from every class of society, but have no use whatever for any groups representing capitalist, middle bourgeoisie or middle peasant interests".

What do the "Government running Marxists" in India now do and where do they stand?

It would be evident from above that government distribution of some vested land for strip cultivation by individual peasants and recording names of *bargadars* (share-croppers) working on personal loyalty and unofficial premium are not land reforms, save socialism. This appears to be some reform but actually, it is petty reformism and an illusion to the peasantry. The government takes back this meagre apparent concession in other ways and means operating in the worsening conditions of the market, it acquires peasants' agricultural fertile land by enforcing so-called Land Reforms Act 1955 and old colonial Land Acquisition Act 1894 etc. which are very "sacred" and "holy" to the parties and Governments of the Right and "Left" to invite and serve multinationals and their local collaborators. The Government operates a double-edged sword to crush the masses of the Indian people. They serve both the existing semi-feudal system in agriculture and imperial capital at the same time and thereby protect the existing order of things in the Indian society.

The official communist "Left" first divided the nascent working class party of India in the name of "fighting against opportunism and revisionism", in the 1960s. Now after some forty years the intrigue is exposed and the thing has turned to its opposite. They now clamour for "development" in collaboration with imperial capital and its domestic offshoots. But, for whom the development does take place? It is certainly not for the common man.

Proponents of industry agree and invoke on the necessity of the entrenchment of industry in the economy and typically point to "downstream employment generation" i.e., to the fact that while not much direct employment may be generated by such industry, the indirect employment to be created in activities spawned by such industry is 'considerable'. "But this argument", according to Probhat Patnaik, "is no more than a pie in the sky for the dispossessed peasants". He traces neo-liberal policy regime as the root cause of anomaly and tension and speaks for the cosmopolitan grand industry, but admits that the employment argument for "industrialisation", i.e. for the development of grand industry, "is without any foundation". The argument that "industrialisation" is necessary because it will take surplus labour out of agriculture is "completely

baseless". He says that "while promoting 'industrialisation', care must be taken to ensure that its destructive effects upon the surrounding population, including especially on the peasantry that faces dispossession, are minimised". There is little doubt that such propositions are contradictory in a coercive, anti-people market economy dominated by international monopoly capital, being the arbiter and regulator of the neo-liberal policies in the actual economic life in the world, for which the states in India are made to vie with one another for such corporate industrialisation, i.e., there is no "reservation" price at which a state, desists from pursuing "corporate industrialisation". Can monopoly capitalism permit labour welfare? What entrenched capitalism would do to the labour which the former in general displaces, sucks and subjugates the latter? There is too much entrenchment of industry and capitalism in the developed capitalist nations. But what is the condition of labour even in those countries? Productive forces have improved without any change in the mode of production.

As Ashok Mitra recently notes, "strangely enough, some from the Government in their bid to justify their premium on Information Technology and similar industries are invoking the Marxian theory that without an entrenched capitalism prospects of socialism will ever remain bleak, so they are eager to see capitalism to grow to pave the way for a socialist country. It puts me to shame that some people boasting their Marxist credentials should argue in this vein because one must not lose sight of the context when Marx wrote it. To ignore this context seems either frivolous or ill-motivated". He further points out, "Laxity in the observance of ideology is a deadly disease. Aberration or laxity gradually becomes a habit and leads a man astray in all fields", and adds that "the leaders and representatives of the proletariat can have no role whatsoever to play in the expansion of capital. Their eternal concern ought to be the promotion of the interests of the working class. But the infantile concept of helping capital to enhance itself by geoperdising the interests of the working class will not find sanction from Marxist ideology".

Some Left intellectuals have recently issued a statement from New Delhi, declaring, "Nobody belonging to the Left would ever justify repressive action against peasants or workers who are the basic classes of the Left". What these leftists have actually done when repressive action against the peasants and workers is meted on an increasing scale in every corner of the country? They only adorn the parliament and assembly and raise a storm in the tea cup to get the Acts "suitably amended" only to maintain the status quo.

The same group of intellectuals says, "The tragedy of Nandigram on March 14 (2007) was an entirely unanticipated, unjustified and unfortunate turn of events...we appeal to all concerned not to let the wounds of Nendigram become festering sores". The ruling cliques of India are already very much charged and fomented with acute contradiction and have already developed many wounds of festering sores and those will surely grow over time. The parliamentary "Left" and their accomplices simply cover it up and idealise reaction by doing with blood and iron. While exposing the trend of Germany's reactionary bourgeois rule and applying proletarian theory to history, Engels wrote in 1887 that "the policy of blood and iron was bound to be successful for a time, it is bound to fail in the end". Do the parliamentary Left and their intellectual friends agree to this view?

What is their role to end the continuous reactionary rule and its policies of blood and iron in India? They are tender, mild and in fact have joined the so-called reformers for "practical politics".

In fact, the Government's "left leaders" make a gross distortion of Marxism in that way only to serve reaction and suppress the working class and peasantry. The basic content and deduction of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) is the rule of the bourgeoisie, class struggle and proletarian revolution and not "entrenched capitalism". □□□