

Chapter III

LANDLORDISM BEFORE AND AFTER INDEPENDENCE

THE British East India Company, as is well-known, brought about a big social upheaval in our country through its decision to introduce Permanent Settlement in Bengal and other forms of statutory landlordism all over the country. This however, was only part of a bigger upheaval which took place in the economic life of our country following the establishment of British rule. This social upheaval is described as follows in the Introduction to the Government of India's publication, *Agricultural Legislation in India*, Vol. III:

"The Industrial Revolution in England, which also created the necessary conditions for the great improvements in British agriculture in the latter half of the 18th and the early 19th centuries, hit the agricultural economy of India in two ways. Political domination, which in the previous period had jealously kept the Indian goods off the foreign markets, now sedulously encouraged, under the cloak of a convenient doctrine of economic liberalism, the free inflow of large masses of consumable goods. The products of indigenous handicrafts were gradually ousted from the markets of the country, and the Indian artisans, bereft of their calling, crowded back on the land as the only means of sustenance. This, helped also by other circumstances, resulted, on the one hand, in the

rapid emergence of the problem of landless proletariat, so long alien to the Indian agricultural economy, and on the other, in the increasing pressure on land, which eventually led to its sub-division into small holdings and fragmented cultivation. The 1931 census revealed that 64 per cent of the rural artisans had forsaken their ancestral occupations and taken to agriculture as the only means of livelihood....

"The second significant manner in which the Industrial Revolution affected Indian agriculture was the change in the pattern of crop production which followed the demand for raw materials by Britain's manufacturing industries. Agricultural production, till the middle of the 18th century, was diversified; the farm and the family had knit together production and consumption into a self-sufficing economy. For the first time, however, the Government of India began to take a more lively interest in the cultivation of commercial crops like cotton, largely owing to the insistent pressure of British manufacturing interests like the Manchester Cotton Supply Association. The special cotton tracts of the Deccan were developed in this manner, while the setting up of the jute mills of Dundee which received an impetus from the use made of jute sacking by the Dutch Government for their East India Coffee trade round about 1838, resulted in the specialisation of large areas in Bengal in the growing of jute.

"In spite, however, of the establishment of peace and order in the country, and definition of landed rights, and the improvements effected in communications and irrigation, the outbreak of famines continued to be a recurring feature during the latter half of the 19th century also. Between 1800 and 1900 no fewer than 31 famines devastated different parts of the country taking a heavy toll of life estimated at 32.4 millions." (pp. i, ii.)

This assessment of the results of British domination on our economy is, however, incomplete. For neither the ruin of handicrafts and impoverishment of artisans nor the change in the pattern of crop production are peculiar phenomena which appeared only in India under British rule; both have appeared in all countries where the new capitalist system was emerging, including Britain itself.

There was, however, one very vital difference between what happened in such capitalist countries as Britain, France, Germany, etc., on the one hand and India and other colonial countries on the other. While, in the former, capitalism was developing inside the country itself, the capitalist employers who made profits being natives of the country concerned, the position was entirely different in India. The result was that in India's case, the control over the newly-formed capitalist economy rested outside the country; it was not any individual or group of people within the country but foreign capitalists who controlled the entire economy. These foreign capitalists were interested not in creating that state system in the colonial countries as had been created in the metropolitan countries, but in integrating the metropolitan and colonial countries into a single system of capitalism. This had two major consequences.

First, the foreign capitalists who controlled the economy as well as the State system used all their economic and political might, not in order to bring about an industrial revolution in India but in order to prevent it. Hence, while the ruin of the artisans was accompanied in Britain by the birth of modern, mechanised, large-scale industry, India has had the misfortune of having her handicrafts ousted from the markets of the country, not by the growth of modern, mechanised, large-scale industry in India itself but by that of Britain. This is what Karl Marx had characterised in his famous *Letters on*

India as "the loss of the old world with no gain of the new."

Second, the change in the pattern of crop production operated in different ways in the capitalist and colonial countries. Even in such capitalist countries as Britain, France, Germany, etc., peasants and farmers, as well as other sections of producers, had to go through the process of successive booms and depressions—phases in which their products got enormously high prices as well as phases in which these prices reached very low levels. While sharing this feature of the price mechanism operating in all capitalist countries, the Indian producers had to undergo the additional difficulty arising out of the fact that these prices, both in the phase of boom as well as in the phase of depression, are controlled, not by anybody inside the country, but by foreign monopolists. The result of this is seen in the fact that, while in every boom, the prices of those commodities which India has to import rose faster than India's own products, exactly the reverse process took place in times of depression. It is this unequal exchange between the Indian and foreign-produced commodities that makes the operation of the laws of the world market particularly severe for our people.

It was because of these factors that, even in those areas where the British did not introduce Permanent Settlement or other forms of statutory landlordism, a new type of landlordism began to emerge. The large mass of peasants began to feel the disastrous consequences of the workings of the new economic system based on the operation of the laws of the world market; they incurred losses at every successive phase of the trade cycle, thus finding themselves more and more indebted. The most heavily-indebted of them had to alienate their lands, first by mortgaging them, and finally selling them. These pauperised peasants, together with the large mass of artisans, could not be absorbed in any industry be-

cause the natural development of the economy on the lines of capitalism was forcibly and artificially prevented by the British rulers. It was these factors that led to "over-population" in the country, pressure on land, competition among those who wanted to get at least a patch of land, etc. It is such a process of progressive pauperisation of the whole people that led to the development of landlordism in its present form in the country—landlordism both in the Zamindari and Ryotwari areas.

These developments were explained as follows by the Hyderabad Agrarian Reforms Committee in its Report:

"Although theoretically the *ryotwari* tenure did not originally contemplate or recognise the existence of any middleman between the State and the registered occupant, yet, on account of the unrestricted right of transfer which was allowed to the occupants or the *pattadar*, inevitably in course of time, though in earlier stages imperceptibly, a class of non-cultivating owners or *pattadars* came into existence. They leased their lands and became rent receivers.

"This development under the *ryotwari* system of tenure was noticed by the Famine Commission of 1879. In paragraph 52 of their report, they observed that 'in consequence of the tendency on the part of those who are recorded as *ryots* to subsist their lands or part of them and to live on the difference between the rent they receive and the revenue they pay to the government a considerable class of subordinate tenants is growing up, who have no permanent interest in the land and who pay such high rents that they must always be in a state of poverty. These subordinates are not recorded and recognised in the government registers, but the existence of such a class involves the same evils as we have dealt

with in the case of tenants in Upper India. We think that the question should be submitted to the consideration of local governments, whether it is contemplated under the land revenue settlement that government *ryots* should be permitted to sublet their lands, and if so, whether measures should not be taken for recognising the status of such sub-tenants and recording the area they hold, the rent they pay and the conditions of their tenure'."

"Absentee landlordism" goes on the Hyderabad Committee, "and Tenancy Farming had their origin thus in the latter half of the 19th century. It was during this period that, for a variety of reasons, national and international, land became, for the first time, a commodity of value to be bought and sold in the market as any other commercial commodity. By reason of the peculiar security that land as property affords, it came to get imparted a value greatly inflated and out of all proportion to its yield capacity. Land, besides an economic value, has always had social and political value of its own. Possession of land has often been a passport for prestige and status in society. As a cumulative effect of all the above factors, people from all walks of life began acquiring land, not for purposes of cultivation by themselves but as a source of business or commercial investment. In course of time, this tendency became more and more pronounced, as a result of which land increasingly passed out of the hands of the owner-cultivators into the hands of non-cultivating classes like moneylenders and others, who lived mostly away from the land and whose sole interest in the land was the amount of rent they could get by letting it to others. As time went by, the disassociation between ownership and the cultivation of land became more pronounced and the number of cultivating *pattadars* began to decrease progressively." (Report, pp. 11, 12, 13.)

The Punjab is famous throughout India as the land of peasant proprietorship. How this system of peasant proprietorship has worked in actual practice is seen in the fact that, out of 31.17 million acres of cultivated area, 15.26 million acres (just over 50%) are cultivated by tenants-at-will who have in general to pay 50% of the gross produce as rent. It is also to be noted that the growth of moneylenders as a class and their activities leading to the pauperisation of the peasants were considered such a vital problem of agrarian economy in the Punjab that special Legislation was enacted (*Land Alienation Act of 1901*) preventing the transfer of land from agricultural to non-agricultural classes. Even this legislation, however, did not arrest the process but only replaced the professional moneylender with the agriculturist moneylender. As the Bengal Land Revenue (Floud) Commission stated after its visit to the Punjab: "*It is a fact that a class of agricultural moneylenders has grown up and we were given to understand that considerable bitterness had developed. The critics of the Act complain that the large landholders are allowed to buy up the holdings of the small holders whereas the non-agriculturists cannot obtain any land at all. They want to amend the Act so that the term 'Agriculturist' will become synonymous with the actual tiller of the soil, and the big landlords who do not themselves cultivate are removed from the list of agricultural tribes.*" (*Report*, Vol. II, p. 41.)

These developments naturally led to discontent among rural masses which broke out in the form of revolts in several areas. The most notable of these revolts have been the Santhal Revolt, the Deccan Riots, the Moplah Riots, etc. Above all, it was this discontent among the peasantry which gave a mass character to that anti-British Revolt which the feudal classes orga-

nised in the middle of the last century—the Sepoy Mutiny.

Spontaneous and ill-led as they were, these revolts of the Indian peasantry were very easily suppressed. They, however, served the purpose of waking up the imperialist rulers of the country to the reality of peasant discontent. The rulers were forced to consider the question of how best to make adjustments in the landlord-tenant relations without altering the basic framework thereof, how best to create confidence in the peasant masses that the Government was alive to, and solicitous of, their needs and requirements.

It was this that led to the adoption of such agrarian legislation as the Bengal Rent Act of 1859 which was later amended in 1885 and 1928; the Madras Estates Land Act of 1908, subsequently amended in 1934; the Oudh Tenancy Act of 1886, the Agra Tenancy Act of 1926, etc. While these are all Acts which regulate the relations between the zamindars and their tenants, some legislation was also adopted in some of the Ryotwari area.

Together with this legislation regulating the relations between landlords and tenants in the Zamindari as well as Ryotwari areas, the British rulers also introduced legislation controlling moneylending; the 1899 Act amending the Contract Act which provided for relief to debtors in cases of unconscionable bargains, on proof of undue influence or where the bargain contained any stipulation by way of penalty; the Usurious Loan Act of 1918 which authorised the courts to reopen transactions which are found to be "substantially unfair", and to relieve the debtor of all liability in respect of any excessive interest; the 1926 Amendment to the 1918 Act made by the Central Government and various amendments made by Provincial Governments, etc.

Legislation was also made for consolidation of holdings (the Baroda Act of 1928 which was wholly per-

missive; the C.P. Act of 1928 and the Punjab Act of 1936 which have an element of compulsion in them, etc.), as well as dealing with irrigation, protection from pests and diseases, improvements in lands, and general development.

The imperialist rulers had hoped that these measures will enable them to create in the minds of peasants a feeling of loyalty to the Government and a faith that their problems are being looked after. These hopes, however, were frustrated. The peasants refused to acknowledge the British rulers as their saviours and protectors. They responded enthusiastically to the call of patriotism and rallied in their millions behind the slogan of Swaraj. Particularly was this so in the years after the First World War, which witnessed an unprecedented combination of the demands of the peasantry in relation to the problems of landlord-tenant relationships with the demands of the entire people for Swaraj.

The years of the Non-Cooperation Movement and after may well be considered the years in which the century-old discontent of the peasantry acquired the character of an all-India movement against imperialist and landlord exploitation. No more were the peasants engaged in isolated and spontaneous actions as in the case of the 19th century revolts, nor were they led by the erstwhile princes and other feudal elements as in the case of the 1857 Mutiny. Here was an anti-imperialist, democratic movement being organised on an all-India scale by a combination of various classes in the country—the rising industrial proletariat, the mass of the peasantry, the modern, progressive-minded intelligentsia, and the new class of capitalists.

The emergence of the peasantry as an important constituent of the modern anti-imperialist, national democratic movement went a step further in the years of the 1929-33 economic crisis and after. Coinciding as it

did with the successful implementation of the gigantic programme of socialist construction in the Soviet Union, this crisis stirred the whole countryside where new revolutionary ideas began to take shape. It was this that took the growing peasant movement to a new stage, a stage in which there emerged an advanced section of the peasantry which refused to play second fiddle to the bourgeoisie in the general anti-imperialist, democratic movement; this vanguard section of the peasantry wanted the mass of peasantry to be rallied under its own banner, to fight for its own demands, and, for that purpose, to form its own organisations. It was thus that peasant organisations began to be formed in certain local areas and were subsequently integrated into District and Provincial organisations. These developments finally led to the formation of an all-India organisation of the peasants—the All-India Kisan Sabha—in 1936.

The distinguishing feature of this new movement of the peasant class was that it demanded not just a few adjustments in the basic framework of land relations but a thorough overhaul of the system itself. As the resolution adopted by the All-India Kisan Sabha at its first session states:

“The object of the kisan movement is to secure complete freedom from economic exploitation and the achievement of full economic and political power for the peasants and workers and all other exploited classes.

“The main task of the kisan movement shall be the organisation of peasants to fight for their immediate political and economic demands in order to prepare them for their emancipation from every form of exploitation.

“The kisan movement stands for the achievement of ultimate economic and political power for the producing masses through its active participation in the national struggle for winning complete independence.”

This, however, was a trend which did not confine itself to the independent movement of the peasants. It was also reflected inside the Indian National Congress. The Faizpur session of the Indian National Congress, held a few months after the Lucknow meeting at which the All-India Kisan Sabha was formed, adopted a resolution on the agrarian problem in the course of which it stated as follows:

“The Congress is convinced that the primary solution of this problem involves the removal of British imperialistic exploitation and a radical change in the inadequate and repressive land tenure and revenue systems. It feels, however, that the deepening crisis has made the burden on the peasantry an intolerable one and immediate relief is urgently called for.”

The Congress demanded among other things that there should be substantial reduction in rent and revenue; that uneconomic holdings should be exempted from rent and land tax; that fixity of tenure with heritable rights along with the right to build houses and plant trees should be provided for all tenants; that arrears of rent for previous years should be wiped out; that arrears of rent should be recoverable in the same manner as civil debts and not by ejection, etc.

It was this new upsurge among the peasant masses, expressed in the activities of the Kisan Sabha and very weakly reflected in the resolutions of the Congress itself, that forced the imperialists to reconsider their stand on the problem of land relations. They began to see that no more would it be sufficient for them to try to make adjustments within the framework of land relations established by the East India Company over a century ago; it was necessary for them to think of revising the system itself. This new realisation on the part of im-

perialists had its echo in the recommendation of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission headed by a British official, that the Permanent Settlement should be abolished. The reasons given by the Commission for this recommendation were as follows:

“1. The zamindars in Bengal never had an absolute right of property in the soil; nor was it intended to give them such rights by the Permanent Settlement.

“2. The existing system has rendered land revenue almost entirely inelastic for about 150 years and the share which the Government ought to receive from the produce of the land is substantially less than the share taken in provinces where there is no Permanent Settlement and where lands are less productive than it is in Bengal.

“3. It has deprived the Government of the benefit of more valuable crops and higher prices and of any share in the increase in the value of land due to increase of population and extension of cultivation or growth of towns and the development of trade and industries the benefit of which is appropriated by a few. Government also does not get any share in the profit from mineral rights and fisheries in certain navigable rivers.

“4. It has resulted in inequalities of assessment having no relation to the productive capacity of land.

“5. The system has deprived the Government of the close contact with and intimate knowledge of rural conditions which the *ryotwari* system affords.

“6. It has imposed an ‘iron framework which has had the effect of stifling the enterprise and initiative of all classes concerned’ with the result that the efficient landlord-tenant system as visualised by Lord Cornwallis has not been realized. On the other hand the ‘evils of absenteeism and management of estates by unsympathetic agents resulting in unhappy relation between the

landlords and tenants have grown to such an extent that Government has been compelled to employ for the protection of the tenants a more stringent measure of legislation than has been found necessary in the temporarily-settled areas.'

"7. It has permitted the creation of a number of intermediaries between the zamindar and the actual cultivator none of whom have either the incentive or the power to provide any effective means for improvement of agriculture. The Government also finds little inducement to spend public money on agricultural development, as the benefit of the improvement goes into private hands, with the result that improvement of agricultural land is nobody's concern.

"8. The number of rent receivers is ever on the increase while there is a steady reduction in the number of cultivating owners of lands and the dispossessed cultivators are swelling the number of *bargadars* or of landless agricultural labourers.

"9. The complexities of the existing system have led to an immense volume of harassing and expensive litigation between the landlords and tenants and in the privately-managed estates illegal collections still represent an appreciable addition to the burdens of the cultivators.

"10. In permanently-settled areas it is virtually impossible to secure remission of rents in areas affected by drought, flood or other natural calamities.

"11. So long as the zamindari system remains, it will be difficult to evolve any satisfactory arrangements for revising rents all over the Province on an equitable basis and for maintaining the records-of-rights. It is also doubtful if under the existing system, the Legislature would ever agree to provide a really efficient machinery for realisation of rent with the result that arrear rents would go on accumulating and there will

be a complete breakdown before long. The stability and security of the land system has already been threatened by the development of no-rent mentality amongst the *ryots* in certain areas." (Appendix to Minute of Dissent of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, *The Famine Inquiry Commission, Final Report*, p. 376—"Reasons which led the Bengal Land Revenue Commission to recommend the abolition of the Permanent Settlement.")

The Second World War, followed by the intensification of the 1943 food crisis, further strengthened the conviction that the system of land relations established by the British East India Company has become a liability for the country. This was reflected in the fact that most of the Provincial Governments concerned with the Zamindari system supported the proposal of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission with regard to the abolition of Permanent Settlement. Here are extracts from the replies given by four Provincial Governments to the 1944 Famine Inquiry Commission on the question of the Zamindari system:

"ORISSA—The zamindars in general, whether of permanently-settled estates or temporarily-settled estates, not only do not introduce any improvement to get better yield or to protect the lands from floods or drought but exploit every opportunity for realisation of enhanced rent or other dues from the tenants. No doubt, cultivators will have a better protection so far as security of their tenancy and rent is concerned under the ryotwari system of land tenure which will in its turn encourage them to improve their holdings and obtain better yield". But they doubt whether the abolition of the system which is "*the only possible remedy*" is a practicable proposition—a point which will be met subsequently.

"BIHAR—The view that unless changes are made

in the prevalent systems of land tenure, it would not be possible to secure any significant increase in agricultural production is in accord with facts. In this Province, most of the estates are permanently settled. In theory, this ought not to stand in the way of improving agricultural production but it does in practice. The elements which go to make for increased agricultural production are (1) better seeds, (2) better manures, (3) better implements, (4) better methods of cultivation, (5) adequate irrigational facilities, and (6) economic or good-sized holdings. The private proprietor (landlord) in most cases cannot afford to provide the first five and where he has the means the incentive is lacking as he stands to gain no direct financial benefit, and still collects his rent irrespective of whether he provides such facilities and services or not. So far as the State is concerned, similarly there is little inducement to spend public money on agricultural development when the benefit of the improvement goes into private hands.... Not so in the ryotwari system. There, a failure of crops consequent on lack of irrigation would directly affect the revenue as remissions have to be given. Similarly, the State has a direct interest in agricultural development as such development and increased productivity are reflected in the increased revenue at the time of revisional settlement. As regards consolidation of holdings, the existence of subinfeudation and continual partition under the Estate Partition Act and fragmentation of holdings due to the systems of inheritance in force offer real difficulties in effective consolidation under the permanent settlement whereas the process will become less difficult if the State were the only landlord.

"The other view that no significant improvement in the standard of life of the cultivating class is possible without a change in the system of (permanently-settled) land tenure has also much to support it.... The Floud

Commission has shown that its liquidation can be effected in an orderly manner, as a business proposition....

"ASSAM—While the ryotwari tenure induces increased production, the opposite is the case in zamindari areas.... Under the zamindari system there is a general feeling of insecurity and short of abolishing this outmoded system no other change will give the full result.

"MADRAS—(a) The zamindari system is defective in that the upkeep of irrigation works is beyond the financial power of zamindars and that if there is any dispute about the repair of an irrigation work or the amount of rent payable, litigation has to be resorted to.... The zamindari system, however, appears to have outlived such advantages as it may have possessed and many zamindars even would welcome its abolition subject to reasonable compensation for the loss of their rights. (Board of Revenue, Madras.)

"(b) Agitation to repeal the zamindari (or permanent) settlement is developing all over the country. It has been accepted as a policy by the Government of Bengal, the former Government of Bihar, etc. The Provincial Legislature, according to the Government of India Act, 1935, is not prohibited from passing a resolution to that effect and getting the sanction from Parliament. This is bound to be done in almost every Province as there is a growing consensus of opinion in its favour even among the zamindars themselves. The only serious difference of opinion is on the nature of compensation to be given to the zamindars for the rights they have so long enjoyed and will be asked to surrender. If this is done, and the ryotwari system extends over the entire Province, there is no doubt that there will be an improvement in irrigation facilities, the maintenance of record of rights, the establishment of co-operative socie-

ties and the extension of the activities of the Agricultural Department." (Director of Agriculture, Madras, *Ibid.*, pp. 349-351.)

Two facts should, however, be noted in relation to the above recommendations of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission and of the four Provincial Governments. *Firstly*, they relate only to the Permanently or Temporarily-settled Zamindari Estates; no suggestion is made that any basic change should be brought about in the Ryotwari areas. *Secondly*, the abolition of the Zamindari system, as conceived by the Bengal Land Revenue Commission and by the Provincial Governments mentioned above, is not abolition in the real sense of the term. Instead of allowing the zamindars to continue to directly own vast estates under their ownership, the new system would allow them only to appropriate a major part of the produce created by the labour of millions of peasants in their estates; instead of allowing zamindars to realise rent directly from the peasants, the new system will make the Government collect the rent from the peasants and pay a part of it to the zamindars as compensation. For, the payment of 'equitable compensation' to the zamindars who are sought to be 'abolished' is an indispensable part of the proposal for the abolition of the zamindari system.

It was this conception of the abolition of the zamindari system with compensation that was taken over by the Congress when it took power on August 15, 1947. There was no essential difference between the imperialist conception of abolition with compensation as laid down in the Report of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission and in the conception of the Congress leadership as it started working on the various State Agrarian Legislations. But the Congress was forced by the very important developments that were then taking place, both in

India and abroad, to make considerable modifications in its initial plans of agrarian reform.

One should recall, in this connection, that the Congress came to power in the midst of a very serious economic crisis in the country. The years of war had thoroughly exposed the bankruptcy of the whole Indian economy; the 1943 Bengal Famine and other developments had shown that the system then prevailing was totally unfit to deal with such important problems as food, cloth, transport, etc. The Congress had repeatedly told the people at the time of the Bengal famine, as well as in the post-Bengal-famine years, that all this was due to the bungling of the foreign imperialist rulers; it had promised to the people that, once British rule is replaced by the rule of the Indian people headed by the Congress, all these difficult problems can be tackled. It was, therefore, natural that the people should expect that these problems would be solved by the new Congress Government. The solution of the food problem was thus of such overriding importance that the Congress Government had to take energetic steps to solve it.

The country was at the same time going through a very serious political crisis. The very manner in which power was transferred on August 15, 1947 created a host of problems like the communal riots, migration of refugees from India to Pakistan and *vice versa*, etc. All these problems were being fully utilised by the princes, landlords and other reactionaries to save as much of their power and privileges as it was possible to do in the new conditions. A solid force of reactionaries was emerging against the new Congress Government.

One of them, the Nizam of Hyderabad, was defying the will of the people of his own State, as well as the will of the people and Government of India, in a desperate bid to keep his own power; at the same time, some others were trying to organise a united front of

reaction with the purpose of replacing the Congress Government by an openly and shamelessly reactionary landlord Government. It was in the course of these efforts on the part of feudal reaction that organisations like the R.S.S. were set up and Mahatma Gandhi was cold-bloodedly murdered.

These deliberate efforts of feudal reaction to undermine the authority of the newly-formed Congress Government, together with such developments as the Tribals' raid from Pakistan on the State of Jammu and Kashmir, brought the Congress Government to the realisation that its regime could not be established and strengthened unless it was able to rally the mass of the Indian people behind it.

It was also becoming clear that the Indian people could not be rallied behind the Congress Government unless the latter took certain decisive steps in the direction of social and economic reform. For, the very process through which the masses of the Indian people came to be united against British imperialism had made them realise—the Congress itself had told them—that independence from the British was only the first step towards social and economic advance; this first step should be followed by other steps, many of which have been outlined in great detail in the various resolutions of the democratic organisations, including the Indian National Congress. Now that this first step towards social and economic advance had been taken—now that a Government completely free and independent in the political sense of the term had taken over—the masses felt that the time had come for this Government to take energetic measures to realise the objectives which had been placed before them during the years before the attainment of Independence.

Nor could the Congress leadership work out the specific measures of social and economic advance as per

its own whims and fancies. For, the working class, the peasantry and other sections of the working people had already evolved their own conceptions of what exactly is meant by social and economic advance. Furthermore, they had already developed their own independent mass organisations which, even in the days of British rule, had waged innumerable struggles for the realisation of their demands. Above all, within the anti-imperialist democratic movement itself had emerged a strong and influential Left movement headed by the Communist Party and certain other parties, all of which had accepted the socialist ideology. These developments had reached such a stage that, at the very time when the British imperialists were negotiating with the Indian National Congress on the one hand and the All-India Muslim League on the other, on the problem of transfer of power, millions upon millions of the common people were fighting such heroic battles as the Quit Kashmir movement, the Tebhaga struggle in Bengal, the anti-Razakar movement in Telangana and innumerable working-class and peasant struggles throughout the country. It was these democratic struggles of the common people that served the purpose of defeating the games of reactionaries in Kashmir, in Hyderabad and other places.

These democratic actions of the mass of our people, however, alarmed the sections of the ruling classes who had organised themselves in the Congress. For, though they proved to be effective counter-weights against the manoeuvres of the imperialist, feudal and communal opponents of the Congress regime, these democratic movements were a threat to the entire ruling classes who were dreaming of tremendous new opportunities for looting the people. As a matter of fact, the leaders of the Government in power started thinking of coming to an agreement with those very people on their Right who were trying to replace them, so that the

existing Government could secure their co-operation in suppressing the growing democratic movement of the people.

While these developments were taking place within the country, extremely significant developments were also taking place abroad. The first post-war Five-Year Plan of the USSR was once again showing the might of the Socialist State and economy; similar developments were taking place in the newly-established People's Democratic States of Eastern Europe; above all, a gigantic revolution was taking place in China, Viet Nam and other Asian countries.

At the very time when a new and independent Indian State was emerging within the framework of the British Commonwealth, a new Chinese State was also emerging as a State which is entirely free from the system of world capitalism. Parallel with the bourgeois-led Indian National Congress, which stands at the helm of affairs in a landlord-and-bourgeois-dominated Indian State, there was the Proletarian Party (the Communist Party of China) heading the new People's Democratic State. As against the Congress proposals of land reform in India—proposals which were calculated to abolish statutory landlordism on payment of "equitable compensation" to landlords—there was the Chinese Communist agrarian reform which totally eliminated the economic and political grip of the landlords over the peasantry. These developments abroad naturally had their impact on the consciousness of our common people who began to think in terms of similar reforms in India as well.

The Congress, therefore, had to make several adjustments in the plan of abolition. These adjustments may be summarised as follows:

Firstly, the Congress did not equate the abolition of landlordism with the abolition of the Zamindari system. The latter was, according to it, only the first step towards

a recasting of the entire land system. While, to the imperialist rulers, the abolition of the Permanent Settlement was the beginning and end of land reform, the Congress talked of "removal of intermediaries between the peasants and the State". Naturally, therefore, land reform legislation should embrace not only the Zamindari, Jagirdari and other statutory landlord areas, but the whole country.

Secondly, though the Congress was at one with the imperialist rulers in laying down the principle that "equitable compensation" should be paid to the landlords when their rights were taken over by the State, the Congress was far from suggesting the payment of full compensation. As a matter of fact, the various Congress Legislations have worked out a graded scale of compensation, the biggest layer of landlords receiving as compensation amounts so low in certain States as three times and even double the net income that they used to get before. It would, therefore, be wrong to consider that the big landlords do not stand to lose anything by these legislations: the interest on the amounts which the biggest landlords get by way of compensation is, as a matter of fact, less than the rent which they used to get before abolition.

The fact, however, remains that, in spite of these adjustments in the imperialist plan, the Congress agrarian legislations so far adopted do not materially differ from the suggestions made by the Bengal Land Revenue Commission and the Provincial Governments in the pre-Independence days. For, though the Congress has, in principle, accepted the need for ending landlordism in the Zamindari as well as the Ryotwari areas, the legislations so far adopted cover mainly if not solely the zamindari areas. Furthermore, the amounts of compensation and rehabilitation allowances worked out by the various State Governments are today so huge a drain on the

incomes of the peasantry that the abolition of the Zamindari system has not made any improvement in the conditions of the peasantry.

That the question of compensation is vitiating the whole range of anti-zamindari legislation is being more and more recognised in democratic circles. The demand for appropriate amendments in the anti-zamindari legislations in order to cancel the provision for compensation, is getting increasing support. This is reflecting itself inside the Congress as is clear from the following observations made by Sri H. D. Malaviya, the Secretary of the Economic and Political Research Department of the AICC in his book, *Land Reforms in India*:

“Abolition of all intermediaries between the State and the tiller has been the starting point of all Congress legislations in the post-Independence period, and it is to be noted with gratification that the abolition of intermediary interests has either already been completed or is well under way in almost all the States except Assam and West Bengal. The Assam State Acquisition of Zamindaries Bill was enacted long ago, but certain amendments became necessary, and that too has been done, and it may be expected that acquisition will commence very shortly. West Bengal, came very late in the field but there too the abolition legislation has been passed by the State Assembly and progress towards actual abolition is likely to commence soon.

“In this connection we would like to discuss briefly the difficulties that may arise with regard to the payment of compensation to the dispossessed intermediaries. We have no authoritative information as to the total amounts involved for all the Part ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ States. Tables 58 on the following page reproduced from the Reserve Bank of India Bulletin of June 1950 would give an approximate idea for the Part ‘A’ States.

TABLE 58

States	Area involved (in lakh acres)	Amount of compensation (in crores of Rs.)
Madras	174.16	15.5
Uttar Pradesh	525.00	140.0
Bihar	396.94	150.0
Madhya Pradesh (excluding merged territories)	394.40	68.5
West Bengal	127.00	25.0
Orissa	100.00	10.5
Assam	16.72	5.0
Total	1734.22	414.0

“The Table does not mention Part ‘A’ States of Bombay and Punjab because these are ryotwari areas. Intermediary systems like *maleki*, *khoti*, *talukdari*, *narwadari*, etc., existed in very small tracts of Bombay, which have been abolished.

“If to these 414 crores be added the sums that have been paid or will be paid as compensation to the intermediaries in Hyderabad, Saurashtra, Madhya Bharat, Rajasthan, Vindhya Pradesh, etc., for which no exact figures are available, the amount may easily reach anywhere between Rs. 500 crores to Rs. 550 crores, if not more.

“While such becomes the liability of the State, the additional annual revenue which will accrue to the State Government as a result of abolition is pitifully low compared to the compensation that will have to be paid. Table 59 [see p. 50], reproduced from the Reserve Bank of India Bulletin shows additional revenue from abolition of zamindari in Part ‘A’ States and its relation to compensation payments.

“That is, in Part ‘A’ States, whereas 414 crores of rupees will have to be paid as compensation, the additional revenue of the State Government would be merely

TABLE 59

States	Amount of compensation (in crores of Rs.)	Additional annual revenue which may accrue to Government (in crores of Rs.)	Additional annual revenue as percentage of total compensation
Madras	15.5	1.0	6.45
Uttar Pradesh	140.0	7.0	5.0
Bihar	150.0	6.5	4.3
Madhya Pradesh (excluding merged territories)	68.5	2.75	4.0
West Bengal	25.5	1.4	5.6
Orissa	10.5	.67	6.7
Assam	5.0	.20	4.0
Total	414.0	19.52	4.71

19.52 crores of rupees that is, a bare 4.71 per cent of the total compensation payable.

"Looking at the shortage of funds for development work as visualised in the Five-Year Plan, it may be worth-while to consider whether the time is not ripe to drastically reduce the scales of compensation payable. The sum involved, anywhere in the neighbourhood of Rs. 550 crores, nearly 25 per cent of the total visualised for the Five-Year Plan, is indeed very huge and will remain a constant source of anxiety for the State exchequers for years to come, as the payment is to be made over a number of years may be 20, 30 or even 40 years in some States. Mr. Kenneth H. Parsons, Professor of Agricultural Economics in the University of Wisconsin, U.S.A. who was asked by the Government of India to study the land reforms in India and submit his observations, has also said that '*Compensation at current values will load the present tenants with considerable debts.*' (Reply to a question by Mr. S. N. Dwivedy from Mr. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Union Minister for Food and

Agriculture, in the Indian Parliament on December 1, 1953).

"One method of scaling down compensation may be to fix an upper ceiling to the total sum payable. Such an amount may be rupees ten lakhs. As a matter of fact the U.P. Zamindari Abolition Committee at one stage in the course of its deliberation had fixed a similar ceiling on total compensation payable, and the decision had to be altered in view of legal and constitutional difficulties.

"Such a ceiling would affect only the biggest intermediaries, and we need not argue here to justify such a step. To arguments about the dispossessed landowner getting equitable compensation and all that—and this equity has not unoften been interpreted to mean market value of land—we may only say that equity is after all a relative term and the profits which the dispossessed ones had had from their landed properties in the form of unearned incomes and other exactions may as well be taken as having equitably paid them for the worth of land. To a modern administration, 'equity' will have to be related to the total social good." (pp. 433-36)

It should finally be stated that the claim very often made by the spokesmen of the Congress that the anti-Zamindari legislation introduced by the Congress Governments have abolished landlordism at least in the Zamindari areas is contested by no less an authority than the author of the "Introduction" to the Government of India's own publication, *Agrarian Legislations in India, Vol. IV:*

"The Acts by themselves are not likely to bring a sudden access to the income of the cultivating class; nor will they immediately remove all the exploitative elements from the rural policy. For these, other complementary measures like regulation of tenancy and

provision of facilities for improvement of land and for better production and sale, will be necessary. But the legislation so far reviewed seeks to (i) simplify existing tenures of land, (ii) establish closer relation between the State and tenantry, (iii) increase the revenue resources of the State and (iv) organise administrative services, in conformity with the rest of the country, in areas, and in respect of classes, which were so long outside their scope. The extent to which these objects would be realised would depend, in large measure, on the speed with which the machinery needed for the implementation of the provision of the several enactments is created and the amount of co-operation that is developed between these agencies and the public."