

## Life-Story of Irawat Singh--Communist Candidate From Assam

# POOR ORPHAN TO PEOPLE'S HERO

## Builder Of Manipuris' Freedom Movement

**IRAWAT SINGH** is the unquestioned leader of the Manipur State people and is regarded as a legendary hero in every Manipuri home. He lost his parents in his infancy and had to struggle along in the world all alone. He had to work as a cook in a students' mess for getting a little education because he could not afford even the monthly tuition fees of four annas.

Being a very talented sportsman, Irawat soon attracted the attention of the Maharajah of Manipur and with his help finished his education. He got married to the Maharaja's niece and went to Calcutta for further study.

### Turning Point In His Life

Those were the great days of the Non-Co-operation Movement. At Calcutta, Irawat heard Gandhi in 1922 addressing mass meetings—and that was the great turning point in his life! He got his first baptism in the fight for freedom and returned to Manipur as an ardent patriot. He was the first man in Manipur State to wear khaddar. This turn in his life towards independent patriotic activity brought on him the wrath of the Maharajah: He was socially ostracised for three years.

Irawat's first activity in the Manipur State was to take up the question of education. He realised that unless the deplorable state of education under the State regime was remedied, there was no taking the Manipuri people forward. He, therefore, started the MANIPUR INSTITUTION which today stands as the Maharajah High School at Imphal.

### Founder Of First People's Organisation

He became a Magistrate in 1927, but he was an entirely different type of Magistrate from others. He used his position in order to go among the people, study their problems and organise them—a task which he found impossible through any other channels under the rigorous feudal regime. He started his first mass campaign for socio-economic uplift of the people; the result was the formation of the MANIPUR MAHASABHA in 1933 mobilising all Manipuris inside and outside the State.

Irawat rose against the Brahman Sabha, a reactionary religious body sponsored and presided over by the Maharajah, which used to excommunicate progressives arbitrarily and extract heavy penalties from them as punishment. In this he came into sharp conflict with the feudal Court. He mobilised 3,000 people and was able to defeat the reactionary game of the Brahman Sabha.

This was the first time in the history of the Manipur State that the Maharajah's unquestioned authority had ever been successfully challenged by anybody!

### Campaign For Popular Franchise

His campaign gathered momentum rapidly and he soon became the Vice-President of the Manipuri Mahasabha at its Mandalay Session in 1937. The same year, Irawat attended the Assam Provincial Rashtriya Conference and exposed for the first time to the outside world the extremely reactionary regime of the Manipur State, dominated by the British Political Agent.

Irawat soon organised the first political mass campaign in the Manipur State for a Legislature based on a popular franchise and mobilised 4,000 signatures to a memorandum. Soon after 1938, the Manipuri Mahasabha Conferences elected him as President, defeating the Maharajah's candidate by 700 votes.

The Manipuri Mahasabha, under Irawat's leadership, began



to grow rapidly as a true people's organisation for winning the freedom of the Manipuris in alliance with the Indian National movement. The Feudal Court, instigated by the British Political Agent, banned the entry of all officials into the Mahasabha.

### Conflict With British Political Agent

The Political Agent soon found a plea to bring, though unsuccessfully, a criminal case against Irawat, as he had got a resolution passed by the Mahasabha condemning shooting of the Digboi Oilfield strikers by the Assam Government police. Knowing that sharp conflict with the authorities was coming, Irawat resigned from the State service to give all his time to the people's service. As a result, the mass movement for popular franchise grew in strength; a wave of patriotic awakening—with khaddar, Gandhi cap and the National Flag as its symbols—swept Manipur.

The need of organising the thousands of Manipuris outside the State was now realised by Irawat. He visited Cachar in 1938, and for the first time roused the Manipuri masses there to work in co-operation with the local Congress.

While in Cachar, Irawat heard of the first mass movement in Imphal (Manipur State) against the indiscriminate rice export by vested interests, with the connivance of the corrupt administration, leading to starvation among the people and of the

Police repression when peaceful women deputationists were bayoneted, and over a hundred wounded.

Irawat returned to Manipur immediately and went straight to the hospital to see the wounded. His presence enthused the people and gave an organised shape to the movement. Within the first night after his arrival, he organised 4,000 volunteers for picketing trunk roads to stop rice exports.

He organised the Manipur PRO-JA MANDAL to raise the movement to a higher pitch and exposed the Political Agent's fabrications that there had been no Police atrocities by publishing actual pictures in the Calcutta Press. He succeeded in linking the Manipuri People's movement with the democratic movement outside and secured the sympathy of the Congress for it. The movement now became wider; the boycott of foreign cloth, complete hartals in the bazars and non-payment of the forest tax, were organised and carried out successfully in the face of severe repression involving over a thousand arrests.

### Arrest: Towards Communism In Jail

In December 1938, Irawat was arrested for sedition and sentenced to three years' hard labour. The jail gate became a place of pilgrimage for thousands. 6,000 attended his trial and the demonstration against his conviction. The authorities became panicky, promulgated Section 144, transferred Irawat to Sylhet, and intensified repression in Manipur.

While in Sylhet jail, Irawat came in contact with Surma Valley Communist leaders who were also detained there at the time. His inherent love for the people and the revolutionary will to work for their liberation attracted him towards Communism. He carefully studied Communist literature and policy during his jail life.

Irawat came out of jail in 1943, a confirmed believer in the policy and ideology of the Communist Party. His entry into the Manipur State was promptly banned. He went to Surma Valley and plunged into the Kisan movement there. He was a delegate at the All-India Kisan Conference at Bhakna.

Irawat attended the First Congress of the Communist Party of India in 1943 as a fraternal delegate of the Manipuri people. What he saw at the Congress made him take the last step and he joined the Party.

### Works Underground For Resistance To Japs

He returned from the Party Congress to Cachar and resumed his work among the kisans. In 1944 came the Jap thrust into his Manipuri homeland and days of acute danger for his people. He announced his burning eagerness to go back to Manipur and help his people to fight the Japs, promising to raise 20,000 volunteers if the authorities allowed him to return.

He issued a public call to his people to resist the Japs. The Governor broadcast his statement to the world over, but shamelessly issued a warrant for his arrest while he was actively organising a Grow More-Food and Anti-Jap campaign among the Cachar kisans.

Irawat immediately went underground, refusing to be drawn away from his people at such a critical hour.

But he was arrested in September 1944 and released after four months.

Years in jail, a hard life outside as a Party whole-timer, and his life underground have affected his health badly, but not his (Continued on page 4, col. 1.)

### Karunasindhu Ray

# 'KRISHAKBANDHU' TO ASSAM PEASANTS

THE Communist candidate from Sunamganj General Constituency is **KARUNASINDHU RAY**. Belonging to the upper-middle class stratum of a sturdy, spirited peasant community, he was elected to the Assam Assembly from this constituency in 1937 on a Congress ticket.

It was the solid support of the Sunamganj peasantry that secured the Congress ticket for him.

The Higher Congress authorities, under pressure from vested interests, were not keen on his selection because he was a leader of the Kisan Sabha and known enemy of all the vested interests. But they had to reckon with strong zamindar opposition against the Congress and Karunasindhu alone could stand up to this opposition. He proved it by defeating this opposition by four thousand votes.

Son of an Under-Secretary of the Bihar Government, Karunasindhu entered the Assam Secretariat even before he could take his degree. But the wave of the Non-Co-operation movement which was on in 1920 caught him and made him give up his job. He threw away his prospects and took to social service work in his native village of Behali.

### In Second C. D. Movement

And since then Karunasindhu has never turned back. During the 1930 movement, he came closer to the local Congress workers and actually plunged into the movement. He took part in the Behali no-tax campaign. The campaign was followed by severe repression and the imposition of a punitive

tax on the entire locality. It was Karunasindhu who took charge of the campaign in its later stages. He was arrested and jailed. Then came the 1932 movement and he was jailed for the second time.

### In Kisan Struggles

His Congress activities brought him face to face with the hard lot of the kisans and he resolved to devote his life to their cause. With the formation of the All-India Kisan Sabha in 1935 he joined the local Left Congressmen in building the Kisan Sabha and later came within the fold of the newly-formed Congress Socialist Party.

He found his natural affinity with the local Communists who were guiding these movements. He was drawn still nearer to them through Left Congress and Kisan Sabha activities, and when he joined the Communist Party in 1939 it was only a logical development of his whole past career.

Forty-eight years old then, Karunasindhu did not mind accepting the guidance of younger leaders inside the Party some of whom could be his own sons! As a matter of fact, he is to Surma Valley Communists almost a Party father; he is one of the oldest veterans among the Left

Congressmen there.

He was President of the Sunamganj Sub-divisional Congress Committee, member of the Sylhet District Congress Executive Committee from 1939 to 1942, President of the Surma Valley Provincial Kisan Sabha up to 1944 and is a member of its Presidium now. He was elected a member of the Central Kisan Council of the All-India Kisan Sabha in 1943 and again in 1944.

Karunasindhu has been in the forefront of the biggest kisan struggles of Surma Valley against the zamindars. He personally led the kisans of Banshikunda Parganas, covering more than fifty villages, and of Begal Pargana, covering twenty-seven villages, against the Gouripur and Bhatipara zamindari system.

The Bhatipara landlords had contrived with police help to unjustly appropriate and auction off crops grown by the Rajapur tenants. Karunasindhu was the first to offer Kisan Satyagraha for asserting the tillers' rights and by reaping paddy himself on the lands attached under Section 145 of the Criminal Procedure Code. He was sentenced for this.

In 1940, he was imprisoned again for offering individual Satyagraha approved by Gandhiji.

Inside the Assam Assembly, Karunasindhu was the only Kisan Sabha and Left Congress spokesman standing consistently for ventilating every matter of people's interest, particularly of the kisans, through Bills, Questions and Motions. Among every section of the people, he earned the name of a people's tribune by his (Continued on page 4, col. 3)

# FOR PEOPLE'S SERVICE, AGAINST PEOPLE'S ENEMIES

## Assam Communists' Work Reviewed

In Surma Valley, our Party was formed by the leading section of the radical Left Congressmen of the pre-war days. It was they who took the main initiative in rebuilding the Congress organisation in the Valley after the failure of the second Civil Disobedience movement and the collapse that followed it.

During the 1938-39 period, they persistently led the biggest Kisan struggles against landlord oppression, built up the Kisan Sabha and fought for legislation on the most burning grievances of the Kisan. For the first time, they broke through the feudal reaction of the White Tea-Plantation bosses, organised the Plantation labourers and built up their trade unions.

ONE has only to read the life-sketches of our Surma Valley comrades to see what part the Communists played in building up the Congress and the people's movements and leading their struggles during 1931-1938.

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## BIRESW MISRA -- COMMUNIST CANDIDATE

# FOR 10 YEARS, ACKNOWLEDGED LEADER OF ASSAM CONGRESS LEFT-WING

One of the most respected Congress workers since 1936 and the unquestioned leader of the Left group in the Surma Valley Congress in the pre-war years, the name of BIRESW MISRA is a household word in the Valley. He commands respect for his integrity and patriotic self-sacrifice ever since his recent political opponents.

BIRESW MISRA has a political life as the early age of sixteen as a member of the Anandamela Society (a socialist group) and undertook the organization of youth associations, athletic clubs, libraries, etc. all over Sylhet—against the patriotic youth of the Valley were inclined to think that the highest honour they could claim was to lay down their lives for the country's freedom.

It was under Biresw's leadership that the Anandamela Society in his native village DRAKADAC-SHIN and Chhara family in other villages grew and flourished during the years 1936 to 1938.

At school, Biresw was a good student and when he matriculated and passed the High School in 1938, it was an uncommonly young age. He then joined the staff of the Government-aided English School, Chhara Higher English School. Under the school, Biresw was the most loved teacher among the students and the leader of the patriotic youth movement.

This was a new thing for Syl-

het. Biresw found it difficult to stick on to his job and keep away from the national struggle. He was about to plunge into the Civil Disobedience movement, but his party told him the time was not yet ripe and stopped him.

In 1938 came the final plunge. All first-year Congress leaders of the District were arrested in a body from the Independence Day procession. Biresw at once gave up his job, took up the leadership of the struggle and kept the Congress banner flying in Surma Valley under the most severe police repression.

Even to-day, his old pupils recall him as a teacher of those days with affection and honor on every page he used to scribble them and weigh their opinions with the greatest respect.

The Police soon got wind of Biresw's work among the students of the school and proceeded upon the school authorities to sack him.

In the midst of this came the national upheaval of 1939. The Assam Government issued an infamous circular—known as the Cunningham Circular—which suppressed the student movements in Government-aided schools. Biresw promptly left his school and joined the national public protest that had been started in pretence against the Cunningham Circular for the withdrawal of the patriotic youth movement.

By his work during these years, Biresw was combined throughout Sylhet as the best speaker and organizer inside the District Congress.

After his release, Biresw found that most of the old Congress (Communist) had fallen victims to the prevailing lawless-ness and lawlessness which had followed upon the failure of the movement, and had become lawless. He took upon himself the responsibility of putting together all the active Congress workers and to set up Congress organisations again in the district.

At this time, following the failure of the Civil Disobedience movement, and widespread disillusionment with Gandhian methods, Left Congressmen were being attracted to Socialist ideology. The Congress Socialist Party came into existence and the leadership was held by the All-India Kisan Sabha. Biresw and his co-workers, being the most consistent and revolutionary among the earlier Congressmen, were totally alienated towards these movements.

Thus the very harbinger of their movement, a thing which was being done in 1939 with the Communist Party and under the able guidance of Chhara family, the Surma Valley Communist Party, acted as the founding group between Sylhet Congress workers, the nearly

10 per cent in March 1939. It was formed in September.

Not knowing what to do by their own hands, the people began to take to looting. We intervened to stop looting, we told the people that their main enemy was the corrupt official and the Justice and these could not be fought by looting. Our intervention stopped looting at several places like Gramapour and Sylhet.

Congress leaders themselves saw at that time that looting and disorder was no way of getting food; the direction issued by the Sylhet Congress War Council and the Justice were people against looting. But beyond this they wanted to do anything positive to help the people.

By the time, the Congress M.L.A.'s themselves had seen the colossal need of re-organising the Government Party. Committees in the interests of the people, and were doing so.

The movement we started of forming Congress' Co-operative Societies as the widest anti-law movement in Surma Valley. We organised about fifty Societies in both the Valleys. Our Societies (PPC) were organised to be self-help units. They were in the Province, we are working with the help of the PPC among a population numbering 10,000 people.

Our work aimed at all the possible aspects of the Province. During the November (1941) Session of the Assam Assembly, we held a PROVINCIAL FOOD CONVENTION at Shillong which was attended by representatives from different parts of the Province. Several Congressmen as well as non-Congressmen, and a whole Congress M.L.A. were present as visitors to the Convention.

tries began pouring from Bengal into Sylhet District. Their death rate was mounting. Within the Province nearly 1,500 people out of a total of 50,000 had died in Berachong (Sylhet) of cholera and dysentery during September and October.

We gave the call for the Bengal and Berachong Relief Campaign throughout the Province. It was through our initiative that the Sylhet District Relief Committee was formed with all sections of the people, including Congressmen, to carry on the Relief Campaign; it was mainly our comrades who have the heart of making surveys, running relief camps, organising and getting Co-operative Societies for self-help formed in Berachong.

The collections made only on our initiative amounted to Rs. 5,000 in cash, 1,000 pieces of old and new clothes and several articles of value. We also played a prominent part in the collection made directly by the District Relief Committee, Sylhet, and the Canteen District Relief Committee.

By the end of March 1944, Assam faced the greatest crisis. The Japs had entered the Province by the time of the Mid-Autumn Week. The most serious famine in all countries since the war, began and looting, without which the food could not be raised, was raging.

At GORAKHAN BARBERIA (who had been released in January 1943) issued a statement on April 29 in which he urged the people not to give credit to the Jap invasion but to defend their lands and lives. He said in the statement that the Japs were not only behind the Jap invasion but also behind the Jap invasion.

This was the time when the Bengal famine and economic crisis were at their height and desperate.

Then regretted that he had not joined it before and passed through the political and organisational education and discipline of the Party in his earlier life. "I am what the Communist Party has made me, justly when I was still not a member but only the political follower and directly since my joining it."

Calling on comrades how the Communist Party takes its discipline and works, he said that he was elected to the Provincial Committee by the Assam Congress and he was elected to the Provincial Committee by the Assam Congress.

It was indeed new experience, Chhara said, "and how can I forget patriotic remarks and keep away from this revolutionary brotherhood."

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