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P. Sundarayya on the Agrarian Question

No individual has had as great an influence on the CPI(M)'s formulation and programmatic understanding of the agrarian question in India as has P. Sundarayya. This article is a brief summary of PS's views on the agrarian question; the reader may consider them notes towards a more detailed description and analysis of PS's position on the agrarian question and agrarian relations in India.

SOURCES

Although there is at present no consolidated volume of PS's writing (or his writings in English) on the agrarian question, a preliminary list of sources can be assembled from different publications. The *Autobiography* has a fair amount of detail on objective conditions in the countryside – though focussing mainly on the Andhra and Telangana years of PS's early life, youth and years of direct mobilising – and on the emergence of PS's consciousness with respect to agrarian and political questions. The *Autobiography* also makes reference to two articles to which PS attached some significance. The first is an article written in 1937 on class differentiation among the peasantry in Andhra. In it, PS used revenue data, "assuming each patta was a household, using acreage as a proxy" for class. The edited transcript of his reminiscences recounts the article thus:

I studied the whole problem in depth and was responsible for the classification of the peasantry – that is, which classes of the peasantry should be co-opted in our struggle against feudalism. Such classification was done for the first time in Andhra. I wrote an article in *The New Age* in 1937 – based on revenue records – explaining in detail the whole class hierarchy in the coastal districts of Andhra. The issue of joint pattas and how much rent they were paying to the landlords was dealt with. More importantly, a broad categorisation of the peasant community was done, applying the Marxist-Leninist theory. An alliance of the oppressed classes in the agricultural sector was proposed. The way in which the classification was done using the meagre revenue records that were available to us was extraordinary for those times. (*Autobiography*, p. 312)

A second article was based on more direct observation, that is, on material collected by means of a questionnaire (though it appears that the questionnaire was canvassed with mass organisers and not the primary households). The material also included information from discussions with area committees that PS conducted as part of his rural appraisal:

During the underground period of the Telangana struggle the questionnaire which we used to elicit information for understanding the class composition of the peasantry applying the Marxist principle served as the basis for writing an article entitled *The Agrarian Question at Present*..The article was published in *Janata*...I met the area committees in Mathapuram, Nalgonda and other such places to study a few villages and report back with the gross statistics. They were summarised in the article. (*ibid.*)

The next main source in English on PS on the agrarian question is *Telangana People's Struggle and its Lessons*, first published in 1972. This is not only the most detailed record of the Telangana people's struggle ever written, but also an analysis and description of agrarian relations and society in the Telugu-speaking areas of the Nizam's dominions. The main findings of the book were summarised in a three-part article published in 1973 in *Social Scientist* under the general title "Telangana People's Struggle 1946-51." Part One of the series, titled "Historical Setting," analyses the objective conditions of agrarian exploitation in the region.

In 1974, PS organised two landmark surveys on a scale and at a level of observational and statistical detail that he had not attempted previously. The two villages that he studied were Ananthavaram in Tenali taluk and Kaza in Guntur taluk in Guntur district. A generalised treatment of agrarian relations, with an empirical section that draws on the surveys, is in *The Land Question*, published in 1976 by the All India Kisan Sabha. More detailed results from the surveys were reported in a three-part article titled "Class Differentiation of the Peasantry: Results of Rural Surveys in Andhra Pradesh," published in *Social Scientist* in 1977.

A very important archival source of material on P. Sundarayya on the agrarian question are documents that do not bear his name as author, but reflect his stand and viewpoint. I refer, of course, to documents of the CPI(M) published in the collective name of the Party. The two most important – classic, by any objective and informed evaluation — are the agrarian sections of the *Programme* of the CPI(M) of 1964, and *Tasks on the Kisan Front* (1967). There is little doubt that PS was responsible for the major formulations in both, and that he participated (or shared in) the task of writing them. *Tasks on the Kisan Front*, which was first drafted by Comrades P. Sundarayya and M. Basavapunniah, is the most distinguished (though now partly dated) political pamphlet on the agrarian question in India ever published.

A third document – “On Certain Agrarian Issues, with an explanatory note on the Resolution by P. Sundarayya, General Secretary of the CPI(M)” – also clearly bears the stamp of Comrade PS. It is, however, a document of more limited scope than the others mentioned in this category, being more specific to time and circumstance than the other two. It was also the weakest of the major agrarian documents with which PS was associated, and to which he put his name.

I have used yet another source. In June-July 1980, I spent some five weeks in PS’s home in Hyderabad, attending what would nowadays be called a “workshop” (a one-person workshop in this case) on agrarian issues, with PS as instructor. During that period I transcribed the bulk of the notes on the agrarian question that PS had written for party classes conducted in Andhra Pradesh in 1968 (these notes appear as an annexure to this article). I also have notes on PS’s responses to questions that I asked, both general questions and questions raised in response to texts that he had instructed me to read. I shall use these notes to illustrate some of the points in this article.

STATE POWER

It was clearly PS’s view that the agrarian question in a society is a subset of the general question of the state and state power in that society. The Marxist-Leninist view of the state, revisionist formulations notwithstanding, has nothing in common with the bourgeois-liberal view.

The formulation and delineation of the agrarian question and the identification of its main features in a society is determined and circumscribed by the nature and composition of the ruling classes, the executive committee of which, so to speak, is the state. This fact has several implications, of which we mention four.

First, if the agrarian question is framed by the nature of state power, the resolution of the agrarian question in India is ultimately inseparable from the struggle against the bourgeois-landlord state – more particularly the state of the bourgeoisie and landlords, led by the big bourgeoisie, who are in increasing collaboration with foreign finance capital in pursuit of the capitalist path of development. PS was clear that the crux of the political-philosophical struggle that resulted ultimately in the formation of the CPI(M) was the struggle to understand and categorise theoretically the precise nature of the ruling classes and state power in India.

Secondly, an important determinant of the agrarian question in India is the fact that the bourgeoisie, particularly in less-developed countries, is incapable of completing — in a thorough and consistent way — the historical tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution.

[The] narrow class interests [of the Indian bourgeoisie] and its desire to perpetuate its class rule, compel it to compromise and ally with feudal

and semi-feudal landlordism, and pit it against urgently-needed radical agrarian reforms. There is no 'path' open to the Indian big bourgeoisie, whether it is the 'American' or 'Junker' type except its present path, which is plunging the country more and more into the crisis, with no way out within the narrow class framework of the bourgeois-landlord alliance. (*Tasks on the Kisan Front*, para. 7)

On the failure of the bourgeoisie to carry through the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, PS recommended in his classes that comrades read *The Civil War in France*, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, and the writings of Marx and Engels on the failure of the revolutions of 1848. PS would also quote Lenin to say that it was the task of the proletariat to pick up the banner of freedom that the bourgeoisie was unable to carry.

Thirdly, and this follows from the Leninist conception of state power, if the contradiction between the forces of people's democracy and socialism on the one hand and of the status quo on the other are irreconcilable, then the ultimate resolution of the agrarian question requires the end of the present state structure.

It is evident that without dislodging the present big bourgeois leadership which has allied with landlordism from the leading position in state power and in its place establishing the hegemony of the working class over the state, no radical reforms in the genuine interests of the peasantry can be carried out, which alone can ensure enough food for our starving people, adequate raw material and [an] expanding market for our industrial goods and surplus capital formation for the country's development. (Party Programme 1964, para 93)

. . . These basic and fundamental tasks of the revolution in today's context cannot be carried out except in determined opposition to and struggle against the big bourgeoisie and its political representatives who occupy the leading political position in the state. They resist and oppose the carrying out of radical and genuine agrarian reform and [have] embarked upon the path of reforming feudal and semi-feudal landlordism to serve their narrow class interest, of allying with them to buttress their narrow class domination (Party Programme 1964, para 98).

Fourthly, the foregoing suggests that the component part of state power that is represented most strongly in rural India – the pillar of state power in the villages, where 70 per cent of the population lives – is the class of landlords.

FOREMOST NATIONAL QUESTION

Perhaps the most important formulation regarding the agrarian question, as comprehended in practice by the Communist-led kisan and rural workers' movement, and crystallised into a single phrase in the Programme of the CPI(M), is that the agrarian question in India is India's "foremost national question." This formulation has two aspects. First, it is true in the elementary sense that, as long as the majority of the people of India live and work in rural areas (and in small towns and semi-rural areas as well), the solution of their socio-economic and political problems constitutes the major task of the people's democratic revolution. The second and deeper aspect of the formulation is that the agrarian revolution is the axis of the people's democratic revolution; no progressive transformation of the social relations of production, of livelihoods and overall economy in India is possible without resolving the agrarian question.

Situated as our socio-economic set-up is at the present stage of development, the agrarian crisis cannot be viewed merely as a crisis in one among several sectors of our economy. *The entire course of social progress and development hinges upon the solution of the agrarian crisis.* It is precisely because of this realisation that our party in its Programme speaks of the agrarian and peasant question as "the foremost national question." Again, it is not without immense significance that *Marxist-Leninists always characterise the agrarian revolution as the axis of the democratic revolution.* The profound meaning and content of these generalisations can be correctly appreciated provided we take a look at our countryside and analyse our economic situation. (*Tasks on the Kisan Front*, para 29, emphasis added)

STUDY THE COUNTRYSIDE

Sundarayya was clear that, if rural society was to be changed, it had to be understood. While comprehending the agrarian question as a whole, the peasant movement had, further, to understand local situations and socio-economic circumstances, and had to formulate local demands relevant to these situations in order to grow.

We have to examine how far...class divisions have taken place in the villages and have a proper understanding of it. We have to assess how extensively and in what forms exploitation is going on in the villages and also how this exploitation is affecting the agricultural workers, poor, middle, and rich peasants. Only then can we understand their various demands and formulate them properly. Only then can we unite the various sections of the peasantry on appropriate issues and on appropriate occasions and evolve correct tactics to wage the struggle against the landlords to win these demands. (Sundarayya, *The Land Question*, p. 13)

PS thus emphasised the need to *study* agrarian relations in different parts of the country, seeking to set an example in this regard with the Anantavaram-Kaza study in Andhra Pradesh. Although PS had intended that such surveys be conducted by comrades in different parts of India, other events overtook this effort, and while some studies were undertaken, nothing like the body of material that he envisaged being at the disposal of the Kisan Sabha and the agrarian movement emerged.

The need to study specific agrarian situations in order to arrive at conclusions for action was an article of faith for PS; he referred to those who theorised with no reference to the geographical and historical context with irony – as “the professors.”

IDENTIFYING CLASSES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

A great deal of PS's efforts in the study of agrarian relations was focussed on formulating criteria for the identification of classes in the countryside. The main influences on PS's work in this regard were, I believe, Lenin's *Development of Capitalism in Russia* and *To the Rural Poor*, but more particularly Mao Zedong's writings on the peasantry, particularly *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan* and *Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society*, and the documents and formulations of land-reform legislation in post-liberation China (including Liu Shaoqi's speech titled “On the Agrarian Reform Law”).

The basic contours of PS's analysis in this regard are readily available in *The Land Question*, in his writings on the Andhra Pradesh surveys, in *Tasks on the Kisan Front*, and in the Annexure to this article, and I shall not recount them here in any great detail.

The three main socio-economic class strata in a village were the landlords, agricultural workers and a differentiated peasantry.

Landlords have the following main characteristics. They own the most and the best land in the village. Landlords do not work at the major manual operations on the land, and cultivate it by means of tenants or hired workers. Landlords generally belong to families that have historically participated in the land monopoly in the village. Landlords as a class dominate social, economic and political hierarchies in the village. Landlords also dominate opportunities for other forms of income-bearing activity in a village.

Agricultural workers spend most of their working time on and earn most of their incomes from work as hired labour. They are, generally speaking, free from ownership of the means of production, though they may own or operate small plots of land.

The *peasantry* is not a single, homogenous class, but stratified into rich, middle and poor sections. All peasant households have members who actually participate in manual work. The criteria for stratification of peasant

households are threefold: the extent of ownership of the means of production, the exploitation of labour (i.e., the relationship between family labour and hired labour on the peasant farm), and the surplus that accrues to a household.

There are also classes in a village not directly engaged in crop production, and these are to be analysed and classified separately.

There are two preliminary caveats to the scheme. The first is that such a framework is *location*-specific: the precise criteria have to be modified according to the agro-ecological and socio-economic conditions in a village or region. Secondly, the criteria have to be understood in a *historical* context. Landlords cover a historical range and a wide combination of pre-capitalist and capitalist characteristics. The category of rich peasantry could also cover, theoretically, a wide range of socio-economic characteristics: from a rack-rented old-style rich peasant whose contradiction with landlordism is deep and antagonistic, to a rich peasant who is himself a nascent rich capitalist farmer or landlord. Similarly, the category of agricultural labourer could cover a wide spectrum, from bonded labour to proletarian, with many possible shades of grey (or combinations of the features of both) in between. Once again, PS had no patience with schemes for the classification of the peasantry that were inflexible with regard to historical and geographical position.

The physical extent of land owned and operated by a peasant household is, of course, not a sufficient (and, if taken in isolation, can be a misleading) indicator of socio-economic class. Nevertheless, *within* different agrarian regimes, PS generally suggested that students of agrarian relations work out broad indicators of the actual extent of the land owned and operated by different classes, particularly landlords and rich peasants.

PS carried over an important lesson from the Chinese experience to the Indian: that the enemy class in the countryside, the landlords, should not exceed 5 to 6 per cent of the population of the countryside (see, for example, *The Land Question*, p. 13). In his notes for study classes, PS wrote: "Keep in mind Chairman Mao's behest: never extend on any particular moment your target...beyond 8 per cent of the households or 10 per cent of the population."

In the class struggle in the countryside, the proletarian party had to "place its principal reliance on rural labourers and poor peasantry, who constituted 70 per cent of the peasantry," in order to undertake

as its main task the work of organising the agricultural labourers and poor peasants on the basis of their specific demands; of uniting them with the rest of the peasantry and of consciously training active cadres from the ranks of agricultural labourers and rural poor in order to make them the militant vanguard of the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution. (*Tasks on the Kisan Front*, para 5)

PS presented his view of the differentiation of the peasantry and the criteria used to identify peasant classes in different places. A detailed analysis of the current validity of the findings of the different studies he conducted in his time (that is, from 1930 to the mid-1970s), and of the criteria and theoretical categories he used, requires more detailed evaluation and analysis than is possible in this article. Nevertheless, some salient points emerge.

1. The capitalist transformation of the countryside has advanced to levels far beyond those achieved in PS's time. Capitalist landlordism has, concomitantly, advanced. In many parts of India, a new class of rich capitalist farmers has emerged. Such capitalist farmers, in common with landlords, do not participate in the major manual operations on the land. The main difference between them and capitalist landlords is that they did not historically belong to a class that participated in the traditional land monopoly in the village and did no family labour. Some of them came from rich peasant or upper-middle peasant families that had a tradition of family labour, whose members, in fact, actually worked at major manual tasks even in the present or previous generation. Such families invested the surplus they gained from agriculture or other activities — including moneylending, salaried employment, trade and business — in land. Agriculture was or became the focal point of their activity, and the basis of their economic power.

2. In general, the character of rich peasants has changed. The prevalence of a rack-rented rich peasantry, deeply in debt to the landlords, and thus a potential ally of the movement led by the poor peasantry and agricultural workers, has receded. In other words, the contradiction between the rich peasants and landlords and big capitalist farmers is blunter than it was in the 1970s.

3. Mechanisation has had a very big impact on the volume and pattern of the seasonal deployment of family labour. Other than in very backward areas, tractor-based operations predominate in land preparation, and motor-pump technology predominates in groundwater irrigation. In most of the country, some form of mechanisation predominates in threshing, and harvesters have come to play an important role in wheat harvesting. The combined effect of these has been that inputs of family labour have widely been reduced in specific operations in cereal production in many (though not all) parts of the country. Further, when mechanisation occurs, agricultural operations are less staggered than previously, and the demand for labour peaks too steeply to be met by the deployment of family labour alone (for example, if harvesting on a field can be done over a week or more, a family can do it; if it is to be done over two days, it requires hired labour).

4. A corollary of the preceding point is that the market for hired labour has broadened; more sections than before are participating in it. A particularly telling statistic is the following. In 2005-6, we resurveyed

Anantavaram, the village surveyed by PS in 1974.¹ We computed the aggregate number of days of hired labour employed on all agricultural land owned and operated by households resident in the village. Of this, no less than 47 per cent was actually hired labour performed by households that were primarily *peasant* households, thus showing that hired labour extended well beyond the class of manual workers in the village. Forty-seven per cent is admittedly a very high figure, nevertheless, the general situation is that (except in very technologically backward, particularly tribal, villages) the proportion of the aggregate number of days of hired labour in agriculture performed by members of households that are primarily peasant households is likely to be greater than 20 per cent.

5. A key – and, in the past, much discussed – formulation in the *Tasks* document is the following:

The surplus value the new-type landlord and the well-to-do peasant is garnering today is determined mainly by virtue of their title to the land, rather than as returns on the invested capital in farming as such (*Tasks on the Kisan Front*, para 9).

Any evaluation of this formulation in contemporary times must recognise three salient features of the present situation. First, returns on invested capital play a much greater part in the surplus value gained by the dominant classes in the countryside today than in the past. With the advance of capitalist relations in the countryside, such an enhanced role is inevitable.

Secondly, although the path played by reinvestment in total surplus value is greater, it is crucial to understand that there is still much life in the formulation in the *Tasks* document. Simple measures of concentration of land ownership show concentration in many parts of India to have remained very high indeed – more than four decades after the *Tasks* document was written and since the 1974 surveys were conducted. The *Tasks* document, quoting the Programme, says that the top 5 per cent households in rural areas owned some 37 per cent of the land. Our surveys show more intense concentration of ownership in many of the villages we have studied. In this context, a further important feature of the rural situation is that even where the *personnel* of the ruling class in a village has changed (that is, new households and families have come to dominate the village, and some or many of the older ruling families have fallen away), land *concentration* as a phenomenon remains intact.

Thirdly, land is not, of course, the only resource controlled by landlords and big capitalist farmers, nor is it their only source of wealth. Many are also involved in lucrative business activities, including, for example, moneylending, grain mills, dairying, trade and speculation in foodgrain and other agricultural, horticultural and silvicultural commodities, cinema theatres, petrol pumps, lodging houses, transport, the sale and lease of agricultural machinery, receiving incomes from financial assets, and so on.

Landlord and big capitalist farmer families seek entry into the institutions of state power – panchayati raj institutions (elected institutions of village-, block- and district-level government) and the higher legislature, the bureaucracy and police, and the legal profession – and are generally the first to take advantage of opportunities for higher education and modern organised-sector employment. Nevertheless, even where the main source of income of landlords and big capitalist farmers is not agriculture, and even where they are in debt or running a balance-sheet loss, the basis of their power in rural areas is their control over land.

6. The rural poor, particularly manual workers and poor peasants, were, then as now, the great reserve army of labour of capitalism in India. A feature of the contemporary situation is that vast numbers of people travel as itinerant workers, particularly as rural-rural and rural-urban migrants. The short- and medium-term mobility, particularly of unskilled and semi-skilled rural workers, has become a major feature of labour markets today.

7. In India, although there are continuities between the era of globalisation and liberalisation and preceding periods, it is clear that, since 1991, state intervention and the part played by imperialism in the countryside – that is, the class policies of the state in rural India – have taken qualitatively new forms.² Nevertheless, this does not take away from the fact that the agrarian question has been, since Independence, and remains, the foremost national question before the people of India. Any resolution of the agrarian question requires revolutionary change, including agrarian reform that targets landlordism, moneylender-merchant exploitation and caste and gender oppression in the countryside. Neo-liberalism has not lessened the tactical or strategic importance of this contradiction; recent developments have sharpened the contradiction rather than blunted it.

COMPLETING THE TASKS OF THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

As a keen observer and analyst of rural society, PS saw – and recorded – the existence of different kinds of pre-capitalist relationships in the countryside, and also the impact of the spread of capitalism on such relationships, leading even to their disappearance – for example, of different kinds of illegal exactions and traditional caste-based payments in cash and kind in the countryside. At the same time, he was clear that there were some aspects of pre-capitalist relations that Indian capitalism was incapable of destroying, and clear on the ways in which the bourgeoisie is incapable of completing the tasks of the democratic revolution.³

The present state in India cannot end landlordism or solve the problem of land hunger in rural India. Without the end of landlordism and the distribution of land we cannot expect the establishment of women's equality in India's villages. The continuation of this form of state power means the

continued existence of the caste system and caste oppression. It means the continued existence of a level of wages in the countryside that has nothing to do with productivity and bears no relation either to need or to the level of wages in urban (organised-sector) occupations, of child labour, of usury and debt bondage, and of different forms of extra-economic coercion, including "the pull of domicile." All of these are accompanied by what can be called the absence of a general democratisation of rural life, and of the absence of scientific thinking on a general scale. And his prophetic statement on school education: "Even for the next 50 years under this system we shall not be able to provide all the children of our villages with 10 years of education." Thirty two years on, the truth of that prediction is there for all to see.

The battle against caste oppression and the crime of untouchability is one that PS fought from his teens, and was essential to his political life. Indeed, in the Biographical Sketch Form that he filled in as the Member of the Legislative Assembly from Gannavaram, in the column titled "Social activities" he wrote:

Struggle against untouchability, Struggle for the economic and cultural development of agricultural labourers & other rural poor and small peasants. Adult education and library activity.

INCREASING COMPLEXITY IN AGRARIAN RELATIONS

PS was once asked about the future of agrarian relations in a situation where capitalism continue to advance, but revolution did not take place. In response, he pointed out that, while differentiation as a process would continue, and while the poor and lower middle peasants, and even some upper-middle and rich peasants, would continue to be squeezed out of land ownership and possession – all this did not mean that it was merely a question of time before the countryside was divided into two (and only two) antagonistic classes, namely capitalist landlord/farmer and proletariat. On the contrary, in the absence of revolutionary change (that is, in the absence of a progressive resolution of the agrarian question), agrarian relations and the agrarian question would become even more complex and more difficult to combat and transform. We must pay a rising penalty – as reaction is embedded even more deeply in the countryside – for leaving the task of agrarian revolution unfinished.

DEMANDS AGAINST LANDLORDISM AND AGAINST THE STATE

Every demand that PS envisaged in the countryside had either directly an anti-landlord aspect or sought to isolate landlords from the general struggle of the peasantry and other rural masses (in general, however, the edge of struggle in the village that PS emphasised was the struggle against landlordism and socioeconomic hierarchy). This is a lesson worth

remembering in the contemporary period of liberalisation: even when the issues are of the “burdens of land revenue and cesses to the Government or local bodies, credit facilities, the price of agricultural crops, irrigation and drainage facilities, democratic rights, the supply of chemical manures and industrial goods at reasonable prices and several other demands [that] are of interest to the entire peasantry,” the task and effort must be to build a movement of “the entire cultivating peasantry” under the leadership of the rural poor.⁴ The task in such contexts is *not* to seek united fronts that include landlords and rich capitalist farmers, who are the pillars of ruling classes and state in the countryside.

WORKER-PEASANT ALLIANCE

In all his major writings and study classes, PS stressed the need to build the worker-peasant alliance as an instrument in the resolution of the agrarian question. The alliance between the working class and peasantry was the foundation on which people’s democratic front was to be built, and such an alliance envisaged direct support by the working class to the struggles for the class demands of the peasantry and rural workers.

FORCES OF PRODUCTION

PS was acutely conscious of the system-moulding influence of the forces of production in a social formation, that is, of the dynamism of the productive forces relative to the sluggishness and backwardness of production relations. He therefore followed changes in agricultural technology very carefully. Any study of his record as a parliamentarian or State legislator would show, for instance, his keen interest in irrigation.

PS had very detailed knowledge of irrigation systems, and his understanding of historical and contemporary riparian systems and irrigation in Andhra Pradesh was unsurpassed. PS believed that the major-versus-minor-irrigation debate was misconceived. In an discussion in 1980, in which he spoke of his views on the Ganga-Kaveri garland canal proposal (he opposed it, suggesting that a Krishna-Kaveri system would be less expensive and would be adequate), PS said (these notes were written as he spoke):

The problem here should not be posed as major *versus* minor irrigation. We cannot simply press for priority of minor irrigation works: in the present conditions, minor irrigation is, in the last analysis, dependent on annual rainfall. If anything, priority should be given to major irrigation [in the] long-term planning of irrigation needs. However, there are areas where it will take a very long time for major irrigation works to make a big change in agriculture; in such areas, minor irrigation works must be developed on a priority basis.

The correct solution is to integrate systems of minor irrigation and major irrigation; [it lies in] building an interlinked system.

PS had an excellent collection of books on the agrarian question and agriculture (these are now available in the library of the Sundarayya Vignana Kendra), and was an avid collector and enthusiast of cartography and maps. In the Biographical Sketch Form as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, his entry under "Hobbies" was, in fact, "Book collection and maps."

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PS was acutely aware that the road to people's democracy in India was a long one; he believed that a Communist must be willing to work throughout a political life, even for half a century, without seeing that goal achieved. PS was a symbol of a generation of Communists who dedicated their lives to those, to recall Brecht's poem, "born after."

Our goal
Lay far in the distance
It was clearly visible, though I myself
Was unlikely to reach it.

What better tribute to P Sundarayya than to commit one's life and efforts to the solution of the agrarian question in India?

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ANNEXURE

[The notes below were taken verbatim from a mimeographed document that was available with Comrade Sundarayya.]

49 Lake Place, Calcutta 29

8th March 1969

CPI(M) Central Committee Office

SEVENTH LESSON: ON THE AGRARIAN QUESTION BY COM. P. SUNDARAYYA

Ours is the second stage of revolution, People's Democratic Revolution against the big bourgeoisie, and landlordism and imperialism. In this main struggle against landlordism, alliance with the whole peasants, basing on agricultural labourers and poor peasants, firm alliance with middle peasants, trying to win over the rich peasants or at least neutralising them. In the socialist revolution, class alliance against rich peasants, basing firmly on agricultural labourer and poor peasant, i.e., rural proletariat and semiproletariat. Working among vacillating middle peasants and trying to keep them with us. In both of these two stages, without forging the alliance with the peasantry by the working class, no victory is possible.

[Give quotations from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin *Scientific Communism* (pages 122 to 128) and from Mao.]

Peasant revolutions alone without the leadership of the working class and the Communist Party cannot succeed. Peasants' leadership in spite of its large numbers cannot be established due to its character of small proprietorship. They have got double aspect, first, of trying to improve their property and trying to climb in to the exploiting classes, and secondly, in being oppressed and gradually being thrown down in the economic ladder and forced to join hands with the rural proletariat and urban working class against the class exploiters. Their scattered nature makes it impossible for them to get the discipline that is drilled into the working class in factories. So because of its political nature as well as physical nature of being scattered, peasantry will never be able to achieve the leadership.

[Quotations from *Scientific Communism* (pp 97-100); Mao Zedong: *On New Democracy; Chinese Revolution and Chinese Communist Party.*]

Our failure was that we did not make the agricultural labourers and poor peasants the basis of our work in the rural areas, but we based mainly on the middle and rich peasant and tried to defend the agricultural labourer and poor peasant interest. This was our main weakness before independence in our struggle against imperialism. As *Tasks* documents states, our failure to bring the agricultural labourer and poor peasant to the forefront in the rural areas and our failure to make the working class go to the rural areas and

organise the agricultural labourers and poor peasants and forge in practice the unity of the industrial proletariat and the rural proletariat and semiproletariat and made it impossible to forge unity of the working class and the peasantry as a whole. It also made it impossible for the working class to be leader of this front...For working class to be leader, its closest class allies must be the dominant leading factor in the villages...

Even after independence, even up to 1952-54 or till now, we have not made agricultural labourers and poor peasants the centre of our work in rural areas. Still essentially we base ourselves in the main on middle and rich peasants.

Have not studied the effect of Congress agrarian legislation and reforms. Their purpose according to Programme and *Tasks*...Should have studies on how far their efforts have succeeded and what are the class differentiation – how far the feudal mode of production is being transformed into the capitalist mode of production.

How to analyse classes among the Peasantry:

Landlords

Generally there is a conception among Party cadres that only those families who have huge tracts of land which are being leased or cultivated through tractors, etc. – only such families can be considered as landlords or the old feudal tenures like zamindari or inamdari, jagirdari or Maletdars, Banjaredars, or desh mukhs or wattandars are to be understood as landlords.

[Are] even those families who supervise their cultivation while employing wage labour, with modern agricultural machinery or no machinery, to be considered only rich peasants, not landlords? No, this is a wrong conception. All those families who do not physically participate in all the principal manual labour at different seasons of agricultural operations throughout the year, should be considered landlords. If they lease their land and get rent or whose income through usury and other feudal exactions are more predominant than even the income from the exploitation of wage labour, such families should be considered as feudal landlords while all those families who get their income mainly from the exploitation of wage labour are to be considered capitalist landlords. Present tendency to consider capitalist farmers and landlords as rich peasants to be given up. Demarcation line between capitalist landlords and rich peasants is that rich peasants are those from whose families one or more members must physically participate in manual labour in major agricultural operations.

Caution: Small landowners, owning small plots of land, tended by relatives or supervisors, while they seek employment in Government or as teachers, “industrial or business lines” – should not be clubbed with landlords on the ground that they are not cultivating with their own labour. If main income is as a teacher, clerk or Government employee or from his

business, must be classified as such and not on the basis of land. However, high officials, those in “higher income brackets” in business or professions, with large tracts of land cultivated through supervisors, either paid or relatives, to be classified as landlords.

Rich peasants

One or more members of the family must participate in the heavy agricultural operations and must do manual labour. If he is content with supervision, then we classify him as landlord.

Usually the income which he gets even in normal times from his farm is not only enough to maintain him with a reasonable standard of living but leaves him with a surplus which could be converted into capital, i.e., new means of production, or exploitation either land [*sic*] or in other ways, or small business etc. and thus further enable him to exploit labour of others.

In certain areas, in certain conditions, if the wage labour (daily, seasonal, annual) which he employs is more than his family labour yet even his income does not leave him any surplus after meeting his minimum standard of living, even then he is to be classified as a rich peasant because a major portion of his income arises from exploitation.

The Chinese Party in its whole classification was quite categorical on this point. Those families who get more than 30% of their income through various forms of exploitation, even such families should be classified as rich peasants and not as middle peasants. Here we are taking broadly all those families where wage labour predominates over the family labour or whose incomes from all kinds of exploitation, wage labour, rent, usury is more than his earned family assured income and these families are to be considered as rich peasants, irrespective of the fact whether it leaves him with a regular surplus in the normal years or not.

Middle peasants

Own land or leased land – cultivate these lands mainly by their own labour – good chunk employ daily wage labourers during the heavy agricultural season or even have small farm servants (of 12-16 years of age) who are not considered adult farm servants and are giving only $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ the wages of a farm servant – Usually, incomes will enable them to meet their meagre standard of living and only in good years they will get some surplus which will be converted into capital – In bad years large sections will not have enough even to meet their meagre subsistence and will be thrown into the lower categories.

In no case should he be considered a middle peasant if family labour does not predominate over wage labour or when his income from family labour is

less than earned from exploitation, irrespective of whether this would be enough to meet his needs or not.

How to Demarcate between a Middle Peasant and a Rich Peasant?

In those cases where family labour predominates and the earned income from family labour is more than that of the income earned from exploitation, in such cases the demarcation line should be based on whether the family has got regular surplus which could be converted into capital (rich peasant) or whether he has got enough only to meet his meagre standard of life and nothing left to be converted into capital (middle peasant).

Poor Peasants

Cannot make both ends meet from the income from land – goes to work as agricultural labourer – In the best of years makes enough to make both ends meet – Never exploits any labour and even in some heavy agricultural seasons, if he hires labour, he himself goes for wage labour under some other persons.

Agricultural labourers

Mainly lives on the sale of his labour power. Even if they own and cultivate small plots of land – main income from wages from agriculture or subsidiary labour occupations allied to agriculture – Keep in mind Chairman Mao's behest: never extend on any particular moment your target if the enemy beyond 8 per cent of the households or 10 per cent of the population.

. . . Analyse from own experience – relationship with acreage and land types –

The Forms of Exploitation that Exist in the Rural Areas

In our rural areas, the predominant forms of land cultivation is not leased or rented. It is the actual owner cultivating by family labour or by employing wage labour, or partly employing wage labour, partly leasing – prevalence of tenancy-at-will – predominant form of cultivation in Andhra is not through tenants.

In classical feudal conditions in Europe – in exchange for land given to peasants for their own cultivation – forced labour – to cultivate land of the lord – Cannot leave land, escape feudal compulsory labour –

In India, remnants of forced labour do exist – for example, during ploughing or transplanting or, in some places, during harvesting, agricultural labour or even peasants in a particular village have to come with their own ploughs to till the land of the landlords even for a day. This kind of forced labour on landlords' land was there even in Nellore district in the villages

when I started work in the 1920s and 1930s among agricultural labourers. This was a much more common feature in the Telangana villages till our struggle, when it reached a high pitch, abolished all the feudal exploitation.

Another feature of the old feudal exploitation is different kinds of village handicraftsmen who have to carry on services to certain families or even to the common village in exchange of standardised contribution from house to house by the very meagre yearly payment of grains – A cobbler has to provide the landowner with all the shoes for the year, for his family and his farm servants. He is also to provide the leather buckets and leather accessories to yoke the cattle to the plough or the cart. Similarly, with the case of the washerman, barber, potter, carpenter or even the blacksmith and the so called village servants, who for their annual fixed payments of grain or certain communal lands or service *inams*, do this labour for the whole village which in fact means for the village landlords and Government. Also seen in low wages for daily labourers or annual farm servants. Practice in Telangana even today when transplantation or harvesting begins, all village poor go and work in fields of landlords on whose field crop is ready for transplanting or reaping – work on it and are content with whatever the landlord gives – this is called *bhiksham*.

It is not in the consciousness of the labourers that it is his right to get his due for labour – old feudal habit that it is my duty and my right to go and work on these fields and it is the duty and the right of the landlord to pay what he wants, a handful of grain, etc.

NOTES

- 1 The survey was conducted by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies as the first in the series of villages surveyed under the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI).
- 2 For a discussion, see Ramachandran and Rawal 2010, and the references therein.
- 3 The points below are from my notes of a conversation with PS on July 23, 1980.
- 4 *Tasks on the Kisan Front*, para 24.