Resistance To The Plan Has Been Heavy:
The Class Struggles of the Green Revolution of India

by John Roosa

From the market everyday at sunset
The reporters brought the rates of grain prices;
All those rates were laid before the King,
One by one, every evening.
—The poet/historian Ishami (1350 A.D.) on the price control system of the king Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316 A.D.) for the city of Delhi.

The two most important staples of the Indian diet are wheat and rice; wheat most commonly consumed in the form of an unleavened flat bread and rice in the form of boiled white rice. These were the two crops Indian capital's planners, in conjunction with Western global planners, targeted after 1965 to develop under the direct control of the government. The strategy went under the name New Agricultural Strategy or under the more popular term, the Green Revolution (G.R. from now on). This article is a brief survey of the circuit of wheat and rice in India, that is to say, a survey of the various struggles over wheat and rice. By analyzing the circuit as a whole, from production to consumption, we will be able to see how seemingly disparate struggles are related, and ultimately how these struggles are related to international capital. It has now been twenty years since the G.R. was adopted as capital's primary plan to control the two basic means of subsistence of the Indian working class. What we are now witnessing is the full explosion of the contradictions of this strategy; the chickens have come home to roost.

The Green Counterrevolution

Following Independence the first strategies Indian capital developed for agriculture were the Community Development program (C.D.) and land reform. After spending at least three decades trying to channel peasant protests into a solely anti-British movement, and after spending the first four years of Independence trying to militarily defeat a large scale peasant rebellion (Telangana), capital's planners sought to create and enforce "equalitarian" social relations in the villages. In looking for a practical social peace in which agricultural production and growth could take place, they envisioned a village system based more upon owner proprietors and farmer cooperatives than on large landlords and tenants. The landlords would be bypassed so the government could organize, amalgamate, and control farmers directly. (The land reform legislation was called "abolition of intermediaries.")[1]

But the planners' airy dreams barely had an impact in the villages and where their plans were implemented the lower castes and small landowners waged their own form of a "non-cooperation movement" with the government's cooperative strategy. Every C.D. project became manipulated at the village level for the benefit of the large landlords. There was hardly ever a possibility that the villagers were going to perform "voluntary labor," which was one of the principles of C.D., when the labor went unpaid and the benefit accrued to a landlord. And certainly the landlords were not going to willingly give up any property despite the moralistic exhortations of the Gandhians. Regardless of the facts that the villagers would not cooperate with their overlords and the overlords would not cooperate with the government, the planners' primary disappointment with the C.D. strategy was that agricultural growth remained stagnant.

In 1957, when the price of foodgrains soared and the government was forced into importing even more wheat, the planners headed back to the drawing board. Their rethinking went along two paths: one was a refurbishing of the C.D. program to make it more "democratic," (this was the "*panchyati raj* program"); and the other was the Intensive Agricultural District Program (IADP). The latter was designed to target individual farmers in limited regions of the country, unlike the C.D. program whose effects, at least in theory, were to benefit villages as a whole and whose coverage was to be nationwide.[2]

The initial appeal of the C.D. strategy for the planners was that the goal of agricultural growth was combined with the goal of pacifying the countryside. The planners counted on obtaining enough food for the urban and industrial working class while also stabilizing rural class relations. In the context of Telangana, China, the Philippines, etc., the Asian peasant revolution was frightening reality for both Indian and global planners. The accumulation of an urban population could not proceed controllably without first arranging agrarian social relations into some workable pattern. Yet within a decade the planners recognized that their method of killing two birds with one stone didn't even bag one bird. The social relations in the villages were not evolving into peaceful village republics. Nor was a marketable surplus forthcoming.

The effective emphasis in the first two Five Year Plans (1952-62) was industrialization, especially of 'heavy industry,' e.g. steel, coal and cement. But the crisis of 1957-8 revealed what one U.S. chronicler of India's State Plans called the "contradictions of rapid industrialization and gradual agrarian reform."[3] The growth of a marketable surplus was not keeping pace with the growth of the urban working class.

Indian factory owners considered themselves blessed by God with a seemingly infinite supply of labor from the villages. In the brutal nomenclature of neoclassical economics, which is put to good use by socialist state planners, there were too many workers in agriculture. Many people could be "siphoned off"—17 million according to one economist in 1966—"without ad-

versely affecting agricultural output."[4] The promotion of industry would provide a "pull" away from agriculture. Yet after expropriating people from the villages, the government then faced the problem of feeding them in the cities, at least at a subsistence level. For the government, uncontrolled price rises in foodgrains meant demands for higher wages, looting of grain shops, street protests, etc. With the rapid accumulation of a proletariat in the cities, the food shortages were becoming acute. One U.S. economist writing in 1962 thought that the food "unavailability" could cause a "backflow," an entire disruption of the "pull model," meaning the people would return to the villages.[5] However, the more likely possibility was that they would continue what they had been doing: tearing up the cities.

Thus, despite God's generosity in labor power, the factory owners and the state planners considered themselves cursed with an inability to induce enough surplus food from the villagers that remained behind. The only way they coped with this problem up to the late 1960's was through importing tons of US wheat and rice through the PL-480 program (Food for Peace). The first shipments were made in 1956. The sum total of these shipments was enormous: about $5 billion worth. By 1973 the debt the Indian government had incurred on the PL-480 account, which was repayable in rupees, equalled one-third of India's total money supply.

A second round of price increases in foodgrains in 1962, threatening "another inflationary price spiral"[6] (with all its connotations of an infinite uncontrolled progression), forced the planners into some further rethinking. They decided to concentrate on the IADP strategy for quick agricultural growth. 1962 was also the beginning of the war with China which was another factor prompting the planners to "put agriculture on a war-footing."[7]

The G.R. grew out of the IADP strategy. It emerged fully in 1965 with the establishment of the government agency the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the announcement of the "New Agricultural Strategy." With the G.R., the government decided to go beyond attempts at regulating the market (primarily through the dispersal of PL-480 stocks) and reforming the villages to the ambitious plan of directly controlling the production and distribution of foodgrains. The G.R. can be outlined as follows: the government facilitates and finances productivity-increasing farming techniques in well-irrigated districts (as per the IADP), offers price incentives to the farmers for

wheat and rice, procures and stockpiles this grain, and then sells it to the urban working class through the Public Distribution System (PDS).

The government advertised this strategy as "food self-reliance" and "food self-discipline;"[8] it was supposedly intended to reduce the dependency on the US for grain. But at the same time the government was advancing this *swadeshi* argument, the US government was insisting that India adopt the G.R. Thus, the G.R. has been interpreted both as an escape from and a capitulation to US imperialism. In actuality, both the US and Indian planners viewed the G.R. as the most practical solution to save capitalism in India. Both the national and global planners wanted a food system that would prevent workers from tearing up the cities and inflation from tearing up the Plan. The G.R. itself did not mark a reduction nor an intensification of dependency on the US. However, it did change the form of that dependency. In exchange for the massive dependency on the PL-480 imports[9], there was to be the dependency on further investments of foreign capital, (e.g. fertilizer companies and the World Bank).

The real impetus behind the switch to the G.R. strategy came not from the U.S. government but from the Indian peasants and workers. Accompanying the intractable resistance of the peasants mentioned above, which shattered the initial C.D. plans for domestic agricultural growth, came an offensive of the industrial working class. Beginning in 1965, Indian capital was faced with the largest strike wave since the post-war years of 1946-7. The number of man days lost due to industrial strikes in 1965 was more than double the 1964 figure. After this sudden increase the figure steadily rose until the Emergency of 1975. The strength of this growing strike wave ensured that capital was unable to make the industrial working class pay for the agricultural crisis. (See the Ministry of Labor's annual reports.)

The role of the U.S. government in the G.R. might be described as that of a cruel midwife. It wanted to see the birth of India's own food system and so offered assistance throughout the birth. Yet it also exacerbated the labor pains: the U.S. government used the agricultural crisis to force some concessions

from Indian capital. In 1965 the U.S. began threatening to withhold or delay PL-480 grain shipments. Indian capital was hardly in a position to fight, for at the time PL-480 grain was their life's blood. From 1963-67 imports of wheat — of which PL-480 formed the largest component — exceeded the domestic marketable surplus by over two-thirds. In 1966 imports were more than double the quantity of the domestic surplus. Thus, in June 1966, India acceded to that quintessential neo-colonial act of capitulation: devaluation of the currency. The rupee was devalued against the dollar by one-third. After further U.S. threats of delay, (the U.S. government's "short-tether" policy begun in August 1966), the Indian government even stopped issuing its rhetorical protests against the U.S. aggression in Vietnam.

The G.R. strategy did not begin to kick in until 1968. In that year imports were less than domestic production. It was not until 1971 that PL-480 grain was discontinued altogether. Given the size of the shipments throughout the 1956-71 period, it is not surprising that both Indian and global planners wanted to switch the strategy. The U.S. had to bolster other parts of the world with its wheat politics; India, with the second largest population in the world, appeared as though it would claim all the grain. The consensus of the planners was that India would have to gain control over its own agricultural producers. They could not continue to rest upon the successes of U.S. capital's century-long struggles in the American midwest. Although the planners considered a government engineering of a domestic food system a "colossal undertaking" that was fraught with "perilous ventures,"[10] it was time for their own rite of passage, their own walkabout, their own conquest. The Indian would have to pioneer forth in regions Uncle Sam never knew.

One of the most significant themes of India's post-Independence agricultural strategy has been the participation of US capital via the government, foundations, corporations, and the World Bank. From the C.D. program, which was designed, implemented, and funded in conjunction with the Ford Foundation, to the IADP which was first proposed by a team of World Bank officials in 1959 and then signed as a "Memorandum of Agreement" with the Ford Foundation in 1960, to the PL-480 foodgrains, to the G.R. itself, US capital has advised every step of the State Plan. The US has taken every opportunity to subordinate Indian capital but they have never been able completely dominate them. Both Indian and US capital's hired pens have called it a "two-track" relationship: a fundamental agreement between the two, with tiffs every now and then.[11] They know that despite occasional "sordid family quarrels" (as Marx once called inter-capitalist fights) about the degree of dependency, they remain brothers. There is much that could be said about this topic but what is relevant here is that the import of the G.R. was to sustain and reproduce a working class in India and this was an objective both US and Indian planners fully shared.

What we are now witnessing is the full explosion of the contradictions of the green revolution: the chickens have come home to roost.

The socialist left has never understood the G.R. in this way. The two main communist parties in India have elevated the disagreements between two symbiotic parasites to the level of the primary contradiction in India (the national bourgeoisie vs. imperialism). They support the government's PDS and, in general, "economic growth" (meaning of course capital accumulation). In fact, the point of their critiques of government policy is to argue that accumulation would proceed quicker without any kind of foreign dependency. To other leftist writers, the G.R. was "a complex system for foreign agribusiness domination,"[12] a sabotage of India's industrialization,[13] or a compromise with imperialism that was necessitated by the Indian bourgeoisie's previous compromise with "feudalism" (by not enforcing land reform legislation).[14] On the other hand, we also have the argument that the G.R. was a progressive development of the productive forces, which by creating more proletarians in agricultural production, would eventually provide the precondition for a "red revolution."[15] In the same way the left has displaced the simple fact that the G.R. was a means to allow Indian capital to expropriate more people from the land, and has sometimes cheered on this expropriation, they have misunderstood the array of contradictions arising from the implementation of the G.R. This array is the subject to which we will now turn.

The Waters of Expropriation

Within the State Plan, "inputs" form the first stage of the G.R., so we'll begin there. The G.R. is most closely associated with a number of productivity-raising inputs: High Yielding Variety seeds (HYV's), chemical fertilizers, toxic pesticides, and tractors. The particular input that we will focus on is irrigation. The HYV's require intensive irrigation so it has become even more of a priority since the adoption of the G.R. Brief mention will also be made of the explosion of Union Carbide Corporation's pesticide factory in Bhopal.

Irrigation primarily means dams. They are used either to provide water directly to farms via canals or to generate electricity to power tubewells. This is their significance for capital, but for the people their significance is expropriation — direct and immediate displacement:

> India has the dubious distinction of having displaced the highest number of people due to the construction of man-made reservoirs among all countries in the world. In the absence of a compendium of exact figures it is difficult to say exactly how many. However, from only 10 selected river-valley development projects an estimated 910,000 persons have either been displaced or will soon be displaced. Considering the fact that over 1,500 major dams have been built or are going to be built in the country, the magnitude of forced relocations of populations necessitated by submergence can be imagined.[16]

Many of the dams are not just for irrigation but the water devoted to agricultural production forms a significant part: "Between 1951 and 1982 forty-six major irrigation projects and 517 medium projects were completed, with fifty more projects nearly finished."[17]

The government has been able to evict millions of people with the help of World Bank and US government loans. Dam construction has been the largest single category for World Bank loans and this is no small sum, given that India presently holds the largest debt to the World Bank among all countries.

It would be impossible to adequately describe the agony and trauma that the dam-displaced people have gone through. Since the water of the dams is intended for use by farms in the plains, they are usually built upstream in relatively remote hill areas. In these areas, the people, most often tribals, (*adivasis* — literally native inhabitants),

have so far been able to escape most of capital's power. As with Native Americans, they have a strong attachment to the land, the forests, and the animals. One adivasi slogan in the state of Maharashtra during a "Land Day" protest in 1973 was "the rain falls on everyone, the sun shines on everyone, and the land belongs to everyone."[18] Their sudden separation from the land means a complete destruction of their way of life. A few commit suicide rather than face a bleak future. The government never provides land for resettlement nor even monetary compensation without a fight. Even then their written promises for compensation are never fully implemented. Ironically, the displaced people often wind up working on the farms in the plains that benefitted from their displacement or on other dam construction sites.[19]

But not all the tribals and villagers have obediently allowed their homes to be submerged. Only rarely have they been able to stop the construction of a dam or even gain better terms for their removal, yet their resistance is growing. Organizations against dams have demanded guaranteed land for relocation (sometimes for land within the area to be covered by the dam) and for guaranteed monetary compensation. But Omvedt notes that "organizers of resistance are beginning to change their tendency to say "the dam must be built but. . ."[20] Once the demand becomes a total rejection of the dam the crucial question will be how the people to be displaced will unite with the people who are employed to actually construct the dam, who are themselves recent victims of dispossession.

Photo by John Roosa

Despite god's generosity in labor power, the factory owners and the state planners considered themselves cursed with an inability to induce enough surplus food from the villagers that remained behind.

In some cases the construction of irrigation facilities does not simply create more landless people but is used as a direct attack upon the landless. In 1974, the government began the Command Area Development Program expressly to impose the Green Revolution model in certain areas by integrating irrigation and other "development" work with the police and military. The World Bank has funded a large part of these command area projects. The first district the W.B. and the Indian government targeted was the Chambal valley along the border of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. This valley has been notorious for its *dacoity* (banditry) and the most famous dacoits in Independent India have been from there: Man Singh, Malkan Singh, and Phoolan Devi. (There was a popular film being made about the latter who was only a teenager when she was the leader of a dacoit band. She is an untouchable and even though she is now imprisoned she remains a powerful symbol of rebellion against the upper caste-class.) Like the Thugs who looted from both the Mughals and the British in this same region, these armed dacoits steal from high-caste landowners and road travellers. Since 1974, while the dacoits have been ruthlessly repressed, irrigation work—with all of the mapping of the terrain necessary for it—has been undertaken. The valley is now virtually 100% irrigated. The government has facilitated bank loans and encouraged wheat production for government procurement. The equivalent of *Time* magazine in India, *India Today*, called it a success story: "From Guns to Tractors" but it was more like "tractors with guns."[21]

Given the variety of resistances to the dams, the government has had a hard time meeting their 5-Year Plan targets. Since 1951, 55% of their irrigation projects have not been completed. If the projects are actually completed, the government then faces the demands of the technicians and electrical workers who run the dams. These workers are relatively better paid and usually organized into trade unions. They frequently go on strike causing blackouts. (I can testify to the militancy of these workers in a small town in Uttar Pradesh where some of the reading for this article was done by candlelight.) The government also faces the demands of the construction workers who are rendered redundant by the dam's completion. Omvedt described a dam workers strike at an irrigation dam in Maharashtra (built for large sugar farmers). She quotes one organizer: "Our demand was that simply because the dam is finished the workers can't stop living! The dam makes the land bear fruit, production will increase ten times, the surrounding district will benefit—and the workers who built the dam can't be let down! So we said."[22]

Eventually the workers were "let down," but they went on to work on a large farm nearby and to organize a union on the farm. No longer dam workers, they continued to fight as agricultural laborers.

At the level of dams then, we are introduced to the recently displaced population of India. They migrate across the countryside, they work at seasonal and temporary jobs. They often give themselves over to "contractors" who makes the arrangements for their migration and labor, a situation which in effect means bonded labor. One non-governmental agency, the Gandhi Peace Foundation, estimated

that there were 2.6 million bonded laborers in India.

But some of the displaced population migrates to the cities. You will see their settlements of huts scattered in and around every Indian city. They squat on any piece of vacant land and try to make some sort of home. Once in the cities they just might meet the urban flipside to the G.R.: the fertilizer and pesticide industries. This is where the Dec. 1984 disaster in Bhopal comes in.

An 'Accident' of the Green Revolution

Union Carbide began its pesticide plant in 1969 just on the edge of the city of Bhopal. In 1984 a chemical chain reaction in a storage tank produced a huge cloud of poisonous gas that blew across the city. It is easy to see how this murderous gas cloud was a result of Union Carbide's profit motive (the violations of safety precautions are far too numerous to mention) and how, on a deeper level, it was the result of the G.R.'s promotion of pesticides for the production of an agricultural surplus.[23] Yet the experience of the slumdwellers of Bhopal reveals another side to Bhopal as a result of the G.R.

Throughout the 1970's and 80's, while Union Carbide was pumping out its toxic pesticide, tens of thousands of displaced people from the countryside were "pumped" into Bhopal. They settled on the cheapest, most devalued land: that around the U.C. plant. Some of these people were perhaps displaced by the dams along the Indravati river in Madhya Pradesh, the state of which Bhopal is the capital. The new immigrants were continually poisoned by the regular "accidental" discharges of gas from the factory. Today the survivors continue to work as milkmen, cigarette rollers and sellers, tonga drivers, cycle and automobile mechanics, and office peons. None worked at the U.C. plant itself nor did they earn as much money as U.C. wage-laborers. Neither the slumdwellers nor the plant's workers were organized well-enough to stop their poisonings (at least two workers died of poisoning in the plant's 15 year history), nor were they strong enough to prevent the ultimate mass murder of Dec. 3, 1984. At least 2,500 people were killed by the poison cloud and literally hundreds of thousands more have been left injured, blinded, traumatized, . . .

Most of the victims—it is essential to realize this—were slumdwellers. When the plant began to leak out its lethal gases in the early morning hours of Dec. 3, the first thing the slumdwellers grabbed before they fled from their makeshift shacks was the legal title to that shack, the putta (literally, address). This little fact tells a tale.

To get their addresses, the people in the slum colonies had been waging a struggle. A legally recognized address enables one to get a ration card with which one has access to government controlled commodities that are sold at subsidized prices, e.g. kerosene, sugar, wheat, and rice. (Similarly, one can not get welfare checks or credit cards in the US without an address.) The putta is also some guarantee, though one often violated, that the government will not evict you. It is a sign of ownership of land even if the land is only 40 square feet. After being expropriated from the villages, the address was their claim for the right to live in the city.

Wheat Production in Punjab

A large share of the inputs, pesticides, fertilizers, etc., is planned for use in a geographically specific area. The two northern states of Punjab and Haryana and the adjacent western section of Uttar Pradesh consume a disproportionate share of inputs in relation to their share in India's total grain production. This region is the heartland of the G.R. After feeding inputs into the region, the government then procures much of the output; in most years the area accounts for over 90% of the government's wheat procurement.

One U.S. Agency for International Development bureaucrat, reviewing the achievements of the G.R., wrote that the "first and most significant" lesson of the G.R. was, "the successful transformation of agriculture in Punjab and Haryana [which] provided the government of India with a stable and administratively manageable source for its food reserve stock."[24]

This successful transformation received its highest expression in Punjab. In only two years since 1972 has its contribution to the reserve stock dipped below 50% of the total stock, and in some years it has gone as high as 75%.[25] Considering that Punjab has only 2% of India's population and produces approximately 22% of India's total wheat production, its contribution to the government's circuit is remarkable.

In Punjab the transformation of the state into the government's "breadbasket" has been nearly total. There is little agricultural production besides wheat and rice (usually farmers grow both crops in a year, wheat being harvested in April-May and rice in Oct.-Nov.) and very little industry. The state's entire economy is dependent on the government's procurement price. The government buys at least 75% of the wheat which is brought to market, and their procurement price functions as a minimum support price. Almost the entire production of the farmers is sold on the wholesale market—93% for wheat and 64% for rice (1978-79 figures). This is unlike all other states in India where, on the average, only 30% of either crop is brought to wholesale markets (meaning 70% is consumed by the grower, handed over to a landlord, or sold locally).[26]

The struggle over the procurement price is the essence of the present "Punjab crisis" which recently has been in the news so much.[27] Particularly from 1981, the Punjab farmers, who are nearly all Sikhs, have been demanding higher procurement prices and lower input prices. For the small to medium sized farmers (usually defined as holding under 10 acres), a break even rate of return is essential for their continued existence as landowners. Although the farmers are highly stratified by size—one-half of Punjab's land is owned by less than 10% of the landowners—to some extent their religious solidarity has served to unify them both organizationally and ideologically. The Akali Dal is a political party which is based in Punjab's 700-odd gurdwaras (loosely, temples) and is explicitly a Sikh political party. And when the leaders of the Akali Dal state that in Punjab "farmer and Sikh are interchangeable terms," one can easily see what the party stands for.[28]

The Akali Dal, along with a Punjab farmers trade union, the BKU, has led the fight against the government. The farmers have often been acting on their demands for more political power and for more concessions from the government by direct action: blockading the grain transport on the roads and railroads, boycotting the wholesale markets

While Union Carbide was pumping out its toxic pesticide, tens of thousands of displaced people from the countryside were "pumped" into Bhopal.

Photo by John Roosa

(that is, refusing to sell their grain), and refusing to pay back bank loans.[29]

The government's response has been state terror. Given Punjab's strategic position within the government's food-grain commodity circuit, these farmers' struggles have a profound impact. The government has spared no expense to make Punjab "administratively manageable." The state has been, in effect, under military rule since 1983, with curfews and police raids becoming a regular and fearful part of life for Punjabis. Over a thousand Sikhs have been killed and many more thousands have been imprisoned and tortured.[30]

The government has justified martial law in the state by portraying the Sikhs as religious fanatics, terrorists, and secessionists. The government has actively promoted a communal divide between Punjabi Sikhs and Hindus ever since Independence. (After all, the government had just executed a huge and tragic communal divide between Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs by creating Pakistan and India. In Punjab 8-10 million people were displaced by Partition.) In 1966, it split the state along communal lines by forming Haryana (mainly Hindu) and Punjab (mainly Sikh). In Haryana, both the Congress Party and the opposition party, the Lok Dal, have been trying to lead the farmers movement in a communal direction. They have blatantly sponsored Hindu chauvinism and at times engineered communal "riots" (i.e. attacks on the Sikhs in Haryana). There have been actions of solidarity between the Punjabi Sikh and the Haryanvi Hindu farmers, but it is increasingly difficult for them to overcome the government's repression and communalization.

During this period of military rule in Punjab, the government has barely increased the procurement prices for wheat and rice. In fact, taking inflation into account, they have decreased it. The government is now trying to end its price incentive strategy for these two crops. It now considers that enough production has been stimulated over the last 20 years, and it should now target its money for other crops. But the Punjabi Sikh farmers consider the 25% rate of return they got in the early 1970's as the norm. The smaller farmers whose costs of production are higher will hardly tolerate the negative profit rate the government is now proffering.

The struggle over the grain procurement price is the essence of the present "Punjab crisis."

The groups that the government labels as terrorist, extremist, and Sikh communal in actuality embody the demands of the farmers. For one example, a resolution of the group the *Damdani Taksal* reads in part:

> If the hard earned income of the people or the natural resources of any nation or region are forcibly plundered; the goods produced by them set at arbitrarily determined prices while the goods bought by them are sold at high prices in order to carry this process of economic exploitation to its logical conclusion, the human rights of a people are crushed, then these are the indices of slavery of that nation, region, or people.[31]

Unfortunately, some Sikh "extremist" groups have adopted a Red Brigadist strategy—assassinating Congress Party politicians, right-wing Hindus, and some Sikhs whom they deem collaborators of the Congress—but they have always denied responsibility for the random killings of Hindus.

Despite the government's decrease in the procurement price (in real terms) and the Sikh farmers' resistance, the government has procured record amounts of wheat and rice since 1984. By 1986, there wasn't enough storage space for all their stockpiles of grain. This huge surplus, bought on the cheap, was one of the intended results of martial law. The procurement process became in effect a military operation. Once again, in May 1987, the Punjab state government was dismissed and central government rule was declared (meaning military rule). Why May? Because that is when the majority of the wheat arrives in the wholesale markets.

The contradiction between the farmers and the government will certainly continue. The Finance Ministry states that "wheat stocks are already far in excess of the country's requirements and any further increase in these stocks is not considered desirable."[32] Thus, the government will continue to keep the procurement price low. Even though it insists that it will maintain a "remunerative price" for wheat and rice-growing farmers, this does not mean that the price will be remunerative for all farmers. Smaller farmers will no doubt still be driven out of business.

Farmers throughout India continue to resist the State agricultural plan by stealing electricity for irrigation, not paying irrigation bills on canals, and not repaying bank loans. For all of India, the government estimates that 45% of total "rural credit" is overdue for repayment (equivalent to about $1 billion). Also there is a 10% loss of electricity due to theft, and the figure is higher for the G.R. states of north India. (Incidentally, the slumdwellers of Bhopal lighted their shacks by illegal connections to Union Carbide power lines.) Farmers organizations such as those in Punjab are well organized throughout the country, though primarily on a regional basis.[33]

Migrant Labor in Punjab

It was mentioned before that one of the jobs the seasonal and migrant laborers take up is agricultural labor. Most of Punjab's G.R. farmers hire migrant laborers. According to one survey of a Punjab district, the majority of the harvesting work was done by migrant laborers.[34] During the peak months of April-May (for wheat) and Oct. (for rice), another study estimated that 200-300,000 men arrive in the state for work.[35] This is perhaps the largest regular migration of people in India. They come by train, jam-packed in the cars or riding on the roofs. The vast majority come from north Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) where the average daily wage is about 2-3 times lower than Punjab's, (which is now about $.50-1.00, and that for about 10 hours of hard work).

This phenomenon of migrant labor, where Bihar serves as the Mexico to Punjab's California, stems from the farmers' desire to break the power of the local Punjabi laborers. With the rapid expansion of agriculture in Punjab after 1965, the local laborers were able to demand higher wages. In the terminology of the economists, the demand for labor outstripped the supply. In reality, there was no "shortage of labor;" there was only a shortage of farmers' power to drive down wages. The farmers were furious after losing so many haggles with their hired hands. The importation of laborers was begun almost immediately, yet it was not really successful in curbing the power of the workers until the mid-1970's. The farmers were able to acquire a new tactic in addition to their age-old *nakabandi* (the prevention of the striking workers from the use of the village common lands for grazing cattle, gathering fodder, and defecating, and the boycott of the workers by the local shopkeepers). The farmers were able to employ the migrant workers for the most toilsome and back-breaking jobs (e.g. transplanting rice) and pay them less. This division of labor and this wage hierarchy have severely hampered the power of both the migrant and local farm workers' struggle.

Yet the daily and persistent struggles of the laborers was an important factor behind the Punjab farmers movement. For the farmers, it appeared easier to turn on the central government than on the workers. The Akali Dal, the BKU, and the numerous "extremist" groups thought they had a better chance of increasing their rate of profit by fighting the central government than by fighting the workers. However, once the farmers were defeated by all the imprisonment, killings, and martial law, they began turning on the workers. In April, 1987, a group known for Sikh communalism and extremism, the All-India Sikh Students Federation, betrayed its true class character by organizing a campaign to lower harvesting wages. It is encouraging to note that the workers have so far been able to resist the nakabandis and the physical assaults. They have prevented any decrease in the wage. One reason for their success is the present lack of migrant labor: many eastern workers have stayed away from Punjab in the last several years due to all the violence.[36]

Within the G.R., Bihar and eastern U.P. have served as the productive sites of a relative surplus population. This is a role the region has played for almost 200 years, ever since the British conquest. In this century, hundreds of thousands of men from this region worked in the jute mills of Bengal. Today one will find their descendants scattered throughout the country, working in the industrial belt along the Bihar-West Bengal border, working on roads in Kashmir, living in the slums of Delhi...Indian state capital has been content to allow large landlords in this region to extract as much rent and labor out of their tenants (and massacre them if they object) without one concern for the productivity of agriculture with which it is obsessed in Punjab.

In this century also, the agrarian struggles in Bihar and eastern U.P. have been among the most militant and large-scale of any in India. It was in this region that Nehru and Gandhi received their initiations into the practice of pacifying peasant revolts.[37]

To them and to other state planners, the region epitomized the non-viability of the landlord-tenant relations of production for maintaining the modicum of social peace requisite for the government's rule over agricultural production. But, as noted earlier, the planners' early naive hopes of social reform being imposed from above were quickly dashed. As one socialist planner later recalled, Bihar and eastern U.P. have been "the graveyard of many economic planners' sturdiest hopes."[38] But if the "graveyard" was not an "administratively manageable" site for agricultural production, under the G.R. it has been good for the production of living labor.

Today Bihar and eastern U.P. are virtually synonymous with class struggle. Tenants and farm workers are well-organized and militant but they face repression from the state police, private armies of the landlords, and central government paramilitary troops. The clearest spectre of a red revolution growing out of the G.R. has come not from the area the G.R. developed (Punjab) but the area it underdeveloped. A question now is how this experience of struggle will be brought into Punjab by the migrant laborers. So far, the exact opposite of struggle has been brought in: a Bihar army regiment was one of several regiments the government used to assault the holiest Sikh gurdwara, the Golden Temple, in June 1984. (At least 800 Sikhs were massacred in this assault.)

Closing the Circuit

Once the farmers get the workers to produce the grain and once the government gets the farmers to sell the grain, it distributes the majority of the grain among its 322,000 "fair-price" and ration shops. All of these shops are located in the cities. Thus, the villagers are virtually excluded from the Public Distribution System (PDS). The system is further lopsided by the fact that the government sends one-half of the grain to only four states: West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Kerela, (in order of decreasing amount). The former three states contain the cities Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, respectively. These are the three largest cities in India, meaning the three largest concentrations of an industrial working class. The government sends a lot of wheat and rice to Kerela, not just because it produces little of its own, but also because it contains very powerful working class and peasant movements, a fact obliquely reflected in the social democratic state government of the Communist Party of India—Marxist (CPI-M).

The overall picture of the G.R. strategy can now be seen. The grain which is grown with all of the productivity-increasing measures in the Punjab area is sent into the cities to feed the industrial working class. The whole circuit is under governmental planning

For the Punjab farmers, it appeared easier to turn against the central government than on the workers. Once the farmers were defeated, then they turned on the workers.

and control. For government planners, it all appears to be a rational economic machine. For socialists it also appears to be eminently rational but hindered by the bad management of intra-ruling class conflicts (the primary one in their view is that between the industrial bourgeoisie and the "rich farmers," i.e. the G.R. farmers).[39] But while technocrats complain about bad management, for the working class the circuit is commodity production purely and simply. It is a system that is not fundamentally different from the food circuit in the USA where it is under the control of a handful of companies and the government. One important difference to note, however, is that it is less extensive in India; presently it covers only 17% of India's total rice production and 20% of its wheat production.

The government tries to set the price to cover at least the costs of procuring, transporting, and storing the grain (which it calls the "economic cost"). Yet as one analyst writing for the Rockefeller Foundation's G.R. research center in Mexico, the one which helped develop the HYV seeds, wrote in 1979: "If grain prices are arbitrarily pegged too high, the urban labor will demand higher wages which will push up the cost curves in the industrial sector leading the economy into an inflationary spiral."[40]

When 60% of urban labor's consumption expenditure is devoted to food, the government's prices translate into one of the crucial determinates of industrial sector profits.

As stated earlier, the G.R. was originally intended to control the prices of foodgrains and thus prevent "inflationary spirals" provoked by working class struggles from ruining their entire plans of capital accumulation. Because the state planners have been scared of repeating the earlier crises, they have tried to keep the selling price of wheat and rice as low as possible. In 1986 the government was procuring wheat at Rs. 162 per 100 kilos and its "economic cost" was Rs. 220. Yet at the same time the government was selling it at Rs. 190, which means they were subsidizing the price by Rs. 30. The government would like to end this subsidy but this it has not been able to do, at least not yet: The struggles of the farmers impose limits on any decreases in the procurement price and the struggles of the urban working class impose limits on any increases in the selling price.

For the people in the cities dependent on government grain, the two crucial questions are its quality and its price. The first strains of HYV wheat that the government promoted were widely disliked because they were not good for making Indian bread. The HYV wheat might have grown bigger and faster than indigenous Indian strains, but its taste and the consistency of its flour were terrible. It was only after years of further tinkering that the government was able to import an HYV strain more acceptable to the people's tastes.

Photo by John Roosa

As for the price: every government attempt to raise the price of foodgrains (or any of the other "essential commodities" it sells) is met with protests and riots. These protests are usually led by women. They buy the food, prepare the bread dough, roll out the circular *chapatis*, and cook them over the fire or stove (usually kerosene stove). Gail Omvedt described some actions by the Women's Anti-Price Rise Committee in Bombay which began in 1972:

> Women storming into the streets, women not marching in hundreds or thousands but in tens of thousands beneath the crowded apartments and the endless tiny shops, beating their steel or brass serving plates with heavy spoons to raise a thunderous din, women barricading the cars of politicians and storming the offices of Bombay merchant kings; women confronting the Minister for Food Supplies in his own kitchen to find out if his family eats the ration food they have to eat; women chasing after Indira Gandhi herself to call her to account for the unbearably rising prices and food shortages that are driving their families into starvation.

In the fall of 1973 they held a 20,000 women-strong Rolling Pin March:

> And now the badge of the movement has become the rolling pin brandished in a clenched fist as a weapon of revolt.[41]

Movements against price hikes form just one part of the urban struggle. In India, as in most Third World countries, 50% or more of a city's population lives in slums. When we talk about an urban working class we are especially talking about slumdwellers. These are the people who have been expropriated by the various facets of the G.R. in the countryside. The rural to urban migration in the last 20 years has been astounding. The capital city of Delhi for instance receives about 200,000 immigrants from the villages every year. Thus, there has been an explosion of urban struggles.

For the past several years in Bombay the fight against slum demolitions by the city government and its bulldozers has become a rallying point for many other sectors of the urban working class. The demand for an address by the slumdwellers in Bhopal was mentioned before. In every Indian city there is a struggle for land, for a space to live, and at the very same time for access to food grown in the countryside. The Congress Party and city governments have tried to repress the slumdwellers with the police, bulldozers, and forced sterilization, divert them with religious communalism, and coopt them with drug, gambling, and liquor rackets. For the state planners it has been the boomerang principle with a vengeance.

Strange Loops

The strange loop phenomenon "occurs whenever, by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started."[42] Now that we have outlined the circuit, we can look at the ways in which it loops back on itself.

The most dreadful loop was the massacre of over 5,000 Sikhs in Delhi and thousands more in other cities in Nov. 1984, one month before the Bhopal disaster. After a Sikh bodyguard murdered Indira Gandhi in revenge for the assault on the Golden Temple, the Congress Party organized the mass killing of Sikhs in cities under their control. The cities affected worst were those where the Congress was well-organized. Thus the capital city of Delhi experienced the worst carnage. There were no attacks on Sikhs in opposition party-led states like West Bengal. The fact that the Congress did it is undeniable, why they did it is an open question. Most probably it was a power grab within the Congress Party itself. But the question relevant here is how they did it.[43]

During the Emergency from 1975-77, the Congress demolished all the slums in and around Delhi and moved the people to the outskirts of the city. The housing colonies built by the Congress government made control over the people much easier than in makeshift and crowded slums. Within these housing colonies, the Congress organized a patronage system wherein the people were dependent upon local party bosses, dadas, for jobs. These dadas have promoted right-wing Hindu groups (which now proliferate in Delhi) and have maintained Mafia-like crime rackets. For the Sikh massacre, the dadas organized the men underneath them to loot and kill the Sikhs. Thus, *the mass killings of Delhi Sikhs occurred only in these Congress-controlled slum colonies on the outskirts of Delhi.*[44]

The killing was done systematically. The bands of looters and murderers held the ration lists of the housing colonies which gave everyone's name and address. From the names they knew who was Sikh, and from the addresses knew where they lived. The bands also had quantities of kerosene from the government ration shops which they used to burn the Sikhs to death.

There are two important points to recognize about the Sikh massacre: first of all, the Hindu chauvinism the government whipped up to suppress the Sikh farmers in Punjab was turned against the Sikh working class in the cities; and secondly the public distribution system serves as a means of social control in the cities.

Another strange loop is the Food for Work Program. Once the government developed this circuit to feed the expropriated population in the cities, it decided to also use the surplus food against the landless in the countryside.

Every government attempt to raise the price of foodgrains is met with protests and riots led by women.

In 1977 it began to put people to work by paying them in foodgrains. During the period 1977-80, it used 9% of its total foodgrain procurement to "generate" 99 million man-days of work. After 1980, the program was renamed and cash wages were added to the payment in grain. The work that the government has delegated to this program is road construction, which, according to a government reference manual, "provides facilities for trade and commerce." Once again, the expropriated are employed to further build the very means of their expropriation.

Another loop of the G.R. is the decline in the production of lentils and oilseeds. By offering high prices for only wheat and rice, two other staples of the Indian diet, lentils (dal) and cooking oil (tel), have been implicitly discouraged. The per capita consumption of both these staples has declined since Independence. The government is now preparing for the Seventh Five-Year Plan, a program to shift the price incentive strategy to lentils and oilseeds. In 1986 a business and government team from the USA offered a new hybrid strain of an oilseed plant that has a high oil yield and promised "a new G.R. in oilseeds." History repeats itself.

One aspect of this program is geographical; the planners want to extend the G.R. model beyond the Punjab area. Presently the centers of oilseed production are the states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, so this is likely to be where the next round of "development" will be.

A fourth loop is Operation Flood, which was a World Bank financed project for milk. The expropriation of people from the land in India is at the same time the expropriation of people from cows. Everyone knows that one of the principles of Hinduism is reverence for the cow. A central point in any villager's life is the cow: taking her to graze, gathering fodder, collecting the dung, shaping it into patties and letting them dry for use as fuel, milking her, and making clarified butter from the milk (ghee). For migrant laborers and urban workers, milk is expensive if available at all. Since the early 1970's, the State Planners have extended the G.R. model to milk. With subsidies from the World Bank and the EEC, they established a system (for Bombay and Delhi in particular) to collect milk in rural and suburban areas, process and refrigerate it in large factories, and then sell it in the cities.

The subsidy from the W.B. and the EEC was in the form of dried milk. The Indian government sold this dried milk and kept the revenue to build the indigenous milk circuit. (Dried milk tastes awful, especially after being shipped across the ocean.) The European countries (and the USA by the way) have tremendous surpluses of milk and milk products which they have been giving away. India was just one recipient. But today the EEC countries and the USA are trying to end their subsidies to dairy farmers. This subject was even a top item on the agenda of the Vienna summit of the Big Seven industrialized countries in May 1987. There were street protests of European dairy farmers in the same month.[45]

A final loop of the circuit that needs to be mentioned is the suppression mechanism. Since the early 1970's the government has been rapidly increasing the numbers of policemen, paramilitary soldiers, and Army soldiers to suppress all the contradictions of the circuit outlined above. But these gunworkers have often been recruited from the ranks of the landless and the recently dispossessed (as we saw with regard to Punjabis and Biharis), so even here the government is having problems. With the rise in the number of gunworkers, there has been a corresponding rise in the number of police strikes and riots. A 1983 survey of police strikes by an American scholar observed, "the lower ranks of the police are now prepared to emulate the tactics of militant labor. They will strike and they will organize."[46]

One of the reasons they have been striking is the lousy working conditions; much of their work is now concerned with attacking riots and demonstrations of workers. According to this overly empirical scholar, the incidence of riot-

ing "per unit of population" (?) has doubled from 1965 to 1977. In 1977, the government estimated that there were 76,000 riots of five or more people.

The Ecological Counterrevolution

Besides these various social struggles which have emerged and intensified because of the G.R., there are also profound ecological contradictions. First of all: desertification. The accumulation of water in certain areas by dams means the depletion of water in other areas. In this way dam irrigation directly contributes to the creation of deserts in downstream areas. Additionally, the cultivation of crops with inorganic fertilizer, pesticides and monocropping depletes the topsoil. In areas where the G.R. farming techniques have been introduced, the fertility of the land has rapidly declined. As one study put it, the "G.R. is threatening to convert even fairly good lands into desert."[47]

Secondly: soil salinization. With all the underground water being pumped up by tubewells in Punjab, the soil is becoming increasingly more saline, (and thus infertile).

Thirdly: soil erosion. The overall process of deforestation (through the submerging of forest by dams, the drying up of some forest lands by desertification, the clearing of forests for farm land, and timber harvesting) leads directly to soil erosion. Ultimately, deforestation translates into further desertification. The G.R. farming techniques also contribute to erosion. Fourthly: this soil erosion loops back onto the dams. Many of the dams are rapidly silting up from the erosion and becoming inoperable sooner than the government expects.

For the Indian people, these four processes mean a deterioration in the use-value of the fundamentals of life: the land and the water. Both desertification and deforestation have led to the expropriation of people from the land. For capital, they mean a decline in the land and the water's exchange value, i.e. a decline in agricultural production. Thus, capital's planners have been trying to cope with land reclamation and afforestation projects. The World Bank has been advising and financing the Indian government for both strategies.

For example, the W.B. has been promoting eucalyptus tree cultivation for afforestation. However, this tree uses up a lot of water and provides neither fuelwood, fodder, nor shade for the villagers. Its appeal for the W.B. is that it grows quickly and can be used for paper and rayon production; it is an "income generating" strategy for the villagers. There is nothing like profiting from both the creation of the disease (deforestation) and the selling of the cure (afforestation). The W.B. knows that the present need is to profit from all the destruction they've been able to inflict in the past forty years: in May 1987 it announced the tripling of its environmental staff in Washington D.C.

The World Bank has been promoting the eucalyptus tree, which uses a lot of water and provides neither fuelwood, fodder nor shade for the villagers.

The Indian planners' response to droughts and desertification has been weather prediction. Part of their satellite program (arranged with NASA) and part of their super-computer program (negotiated with the US government in 1986) is weather monitoring. This will help them predict agricultural production. If there is decreased rainfall they can plan for foodgrain imports to control any revolts in the cities due to increased prices of grain, and they can plan for some water delivery schemes to control any potential rebellions in the countryside due to drought. Indian brahmins used to impose their social power through their control of the weather and their monopoly on any communication with the gods. Now they impose their agricultural strategy with the help of satellites bought from Boston brahmins. Their new mantras are the binary computer languages. (Is it any coincidence that the high-tech yuppies of Boston are into the mysticism of Eastern religions?)

Shortcircuits

Now that we have gone through the circuit and come full circle, from the satellites floating overhead in the sky to the expropriated people of India floating across the countryside, we must leave the concluding statements to one of those who have been uprooted. An elderly woman, who was working on a dam in Maharashtra, explained to Gail Omvedt her view on food and the class struggle:

> Plenty of grain is grown in India. But we workers buy it at high prices. We have to eat one-half or one-fourth of a bhakri [a flat bread similar to a chapati made with millet] and when we remember the land we used to have we can't digest that! We don't even have clothes for our body. As for food, if we get jawar [millet] then we eat jawar, if we get milo [sorghum] we eat milo, if we get vegetables we eat them, if not then chilis. We have to eat dry bhakri. There is no milk. Where would we get milk? We have to drink jaggery [brown sugar] tea without milk. If grain is available we eat, if not we drink water and go to sleep.

The woman said she was ready to go raid a rich merchant's house and "pull and drag a big sack of grain" even though she was old. Then she said:

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FOR THE REALIZATION OF ALMOST-UNHEARD-OF DESIRES

Those who go out on marches, who act for the protection of their stomachs, they will survive. Those who have no hope, who give up and stay away because they are afraid, they will not live![48]

Many thanks to Inder Mohan for sharing his knowledge of Delhi with me; to Smithu Kotheri for help in obtaining some material on human rights in India; and to Chris Chekuri for reading over a draft of the article. The customary disclaimer holds here: they are in no way responsible for the views presented in the article.

Footnotes

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