

## Kulaks and the Left

I HAVE a few comments to offer on Gait Omvedt's angry article on the Shetkari Sanghatana (November 28).

(1) The changes that she describes as having occurred "in the rural sector since independence" are far from universal. They are broadly valid for the 20 per cent irrigated area, but in the rest of the agrarian society the rich peasants (i.e., those who take in labour in addition to that of their families) are not capitalist farmers (except in the purely formal sense of employing wage-labour) nor do they constitute "a part of India's ruling bloc as a whole". Mather, they are either part of a generally oppressed peasantry (as in the still very much feudal areas like large parts of Telengana) or merely the leading stratum of a 'peasant' society that lives from day to day (as in a considerable part of the dry regions in the country). This does not mean that they do not indulge in violence against the rural poor, but that does not in itself make them part of the country's 'ruling bloc'.

(2) The 'questionable role' played by the CPI and CPI(M) in the kulak agitations like that led by Sharad Joshi is not due to theoretical confusion nor even the opportunism of parliamentary politics. It is a direct consequence of their social base. Most of the irrigated regions were the scene (not coincidentally) of anti-feudal (often communist-led) struggles in the past and the leading participants of those struggles are today's kulaks. The CPI, and to a lesser extent the CPI(M), has been unable to sever its umbilical relation with this class. In the delta areas of Andhra, for example, the staunchest supporters of the CPI are the kulaks, most of them Kammas by caste, which has given rise to the joke in reactionary circles that 'communism is Kammaism'. Much the same is happening to the CPI(M) in hitherto dry districts like Nalgonda which has recently acquired irrigation from the Nagarjunasagar project.

(3) Regarding the theoretical understanding of the peasant question, I know little (and care less) about the CPI and CPI(M) but the revolutionary communists have adhered to the Lenin-Mao formulation which sees the poor peasants and landless labourers as the principal revolutionary class with

the middle peasants as an ally; regarding the rich peasantry it is expected that a section of it will be neutralised and the rest will go over to the side of the ruling classes. It seems to me that in India this division of the rich peasantry into neutral and reactionary sections is to be conceived territorially, with the rich peasantry of the irrigated areas going over to the side of the ruling classes and that of the dry/feudal areas being (by and large) amenable to neutralisation. For instance, while the reactionary nature of 'peasant' leaders like Joshi and Naidu (the latter, being less sophisticated than his UN trained friend, has quite openly opposed granting of house sites to harijans) needs no elaboration, visitors to Karimnagar have commented on the fact even quite large landowners are with the Rytu Coolie Sangham.

This is certainly a more useful way of looking at the matter than the suicidal formulation that agrarian India is capitalist — unless it is one's intention (as it is tin; CPI's) to discover a progressive rural bourgeoisie and run behind it.

(4) Lastly, about Joshi's theory of unequal exchange (though I doubt whether he would express it in this language) between town and country ('India' and 'Bharat'). Theories of 'internal colonialism' are among the

numerous dubious progeny of the neo-Marxist movement in the West; they span the width from the childish notion that a colony is a locality that supplies raw materials to the wild excesses of Andre Gunder Frank (at least in his earlier works) who sees the whole world as a hierarchy of metropolis-colony relations. Gail Omvedt is quite right in expressing doubts concerning Joshi's theory. But is she not herself partly culpable in the matter? During the discussion on the Assam question much of the neo-Marxist nonsense was imported into this country and swallowed unsuspectingly by a large number of otherwise very orthodox Marxists; and Gail Omvedt played no mean role in this transplant of ideology. Or does she consider territorial continuity to be such a vital characteristic of a colony that Sharad Joshi's Bharat, which supplies raw materials to India's industry, does not qualify for the description whereas Assam and Jharkhand and perhaps also the Nilgiri hills do so qualify? Perhaps it is time that serious Marxist scholars took up a discussion of 'internal colonialism' (if such a thing can be said to exist). Gail Omvedt, having committed herself at least partially in the matter, could do worse than at least initiate the discussion.

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