

year passed, nothing happened. Spokesmen of the state government cried themselves hoarse, drawing attention of the people to the dilatoriness of the Union government, the same Union government which keeps lecturing to the state governments on the imperative need for land reforms. Emissaries from the state parked themselves in New Delhi and kept up an Eliotesque wail: hurry up please, it is time.

All to no purpose. At the end of fourteen months, the amending bill, duly passed by the state assembly, has been sent back by the Centre, and without according the President's assent. Sorry, the amendment cannot be agreed to, the Ministry of Law has objected, you cannot have retrospective legislation which goes back thirteen years. They stole these lands years ago, undent history being ancient history, they must be allowed to hold on to the stolen property.

This is not all. Apparently, the

Union Ministry of Commerce too has pitched in. It had set up a Task Force on the Export Promotion of Marine Products. This Task Force, according to reports, is aghast at the proposed amendment to the West Bengal Land Reforms Act which will take away the exempt status of fishery tanks from the purview of the ceiling legislation. Should such a catastrophe befall the fishery tanks, the Task Force has bemoaned, there would then occur a precipitous decline in the export of lobsters from the current level of around Rs 25 crore annually. Have your pick, land reforms or export promotion: besides, haven't you heard, so that all loopholes could be plugged, they are moving a new amendment to the Constitution, export promotion is being defined both as a Fundamental Right and as a Directive Principle of State Policy. And please don't ask anyone what happened to the twenty-point programmes, old and/or new.

new shop that is opened, every co-operative society that is formed, draws peasant economy into the orbit of commerce and capitalism. This, the CPI(M) friends try to conceal in the name of 'labouring peasantry'. There is no doubt that owing to the new agrarian policy the peasant bourgeoisie is growing much faster than before. But the peasant bourgeoisie in India cannot help growing because India is a capitalist country which has been completely drawn into the orbit of world capitalism. Bose would have known this had he possessed at least an elementary knowledge of the law of capitalism, of which he speaks with boundless aplomb and equally boundless ignorance.

Marxists cannot confuse bourgeois measures with socialism. Marxists support bourgeois-democratic reforms not because they bring in economic relief (which ultimately they cannot) but because they help develop capitalism, free the peasants from the feudal superstitions and conservatism and facilitate class struggle and revolution. The CPI(M) deserves support only in so far as the party opposes feudalism and serfdom; but in so far as it obscures the growing class struggle in the countryside and mutes the class-struggle in the city, in so far as it preserves peace for the capitalist order and defends the capitalist state by vigorously participating in its administration, it is the greatest of reactionary parties. A READER  
Calcutta,  
July 19.

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## LETTERS TO EDITOR

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### West Bengal's Agrarian Programme

IT is good that Buddhadeb Bose (June 19) has at last realised that West Bengal is not a socialist state but a part of India which has been vigorously pursuing the capitalist path in collaboration with imperialism. Nevertheless, Bose tries to pass off the fiction of peasant prosperity in West Bengal for the reality of dire poverty. He writes glibly of vigorous land reform measures by which the number of very big jotedars in West Bengal has come down appreciably. But our CPI(M) friends gloss over the capitalist nature of modern small farms that employ hired labour. The higher level of agricultural techniques, the more intensive the farming; and the stronger the influence of the market, the more often do we meet with large scale production on small farms.

More importantly, Bose glosses over the fact of the colossal increase in rural indebtedness. A useful analogy is provided by the experience of the freed slaves who, after the American Civil War, were re-enslaved as debt peons, through credit extended to them as tenant farmers or share croppers. Just as the former slave owners no longer had to worry about economic losses from the death or sickness of slaves, debt peonage, not having to rely on direct ownership, can afford to deplete resources or people with relative impunity.

Bose's talk about 'surplus' and 'the marginal, small and middle farmer consuming a substantial portion of increased' production' is such a scandalous imposture that it is necessary to ask him to submit precise data. Taking India as a whole, per capita availability averaged 450.5 grammes during the five years ended 1980 (it was 461 grammes during the five years ended 1965), much below the minimum nutritional needs prescribed by the FAO. India's so-called food surplus is rooted in the inability of many Indians to buy what they desperately need.

Those who praise the agrarian policy of Left Front government try to obscure the fact that the progress achieved affects a very small minority while the majority are in the same old state of bondage and serfdom (in its essence). No increase in the number of plots registered as private property can help the vast peasant masses. What 'improved methods' can there be when dire poverty makes the peasant hire himself out to the landlord at a third of the pay, and makes him sell his grain cheap while buying dear later?

The number of shops opened up in the villages is sometimes claimed as an indicator of the success of the agrarian policy of the Left Front government. The truth is that every

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### Cherabanda Raju

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CHERABANDA RAJU, the revolutionary Telugu poet who died on July 2 (see Obituary, *EPW*, July 24), leaves behind his wife, whose tireless and affectionate care kept him alive longer than he would otherwise have lived, and two children. He neglected their welfare in his single-minded devotion to the revolutionary cause and they are today without any independent means of subsistence. It is the duty of all friends of the Indian revolution to help them. A fund has been set up for the purpose, and contributors may send whatever they can afford to:

K V Ramana Reddy  
11-33-957  
Kavali  
Andhra Pradesh  
Pin 524202

Waltair,  
July 12.

K BALAGOPAL