

HUNGER IN INDIA - WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Under the present rule of the landlords and the foreign-dependent capitalists of India, the misery of Indian people is increasing daily. It is becoming more and more difficult for larger and larger fraction of the population to survive under the extreme exploitation and plunder of their labor and land. The so called democracy in India is only a fig-leaf to hide this barbaric oppression. In 1956-57, fully 40% of the Indian population was below the depressed official poverty line. (Indian government defines the poverty-line income as that necessary to buy 2250 Calories of food per day at local prices with no provision for clothing, housing, health care etc.) In February of this year, Mr. Varma the 'labor minister' to Desai regime confessed in the parliament that the number has reached 80% and is still increasing daily.

Associated with such wide-spread misery and poverty, we find illiteracy, negligible public health care and housing shortage. People are at the mercy of floods, cyclones and storms and even drinking water is not available to a large majority of the Indian people. Anywhere one goes, one cannot miss the rampant unemployment (more than 30%) and starvation.

The imperialists, the reactionary ruling classes of India and their various apologists and lackeys blame the hard working toiling masses of India for their misery. This is as callous as blaming slaves for their slavery. These fascist lackeys peddle various 'theories' of how the Indian people are 'inherently lazy', unproductive, 'spiritually oriented', and how they 'breed like mice'.

Overpopulation is the favorite whipping-boy of a lot of these fascist theoreticians. They rationalize the existence of the poverty of the masses by blaming the people for overpopulation. Such arguments date back to Thomas Malthus (1798) who even urged that some (the poor) must perish when population presses beyond subsistence. Malthus was thoroughly exposed by Marx and Engels for what he was - a bumbling apologist for the landed aristocracy; a reac-

tionary even at that time! (e.g. see "Marx and Engels on the Population Bomb", Ramparts Press). Since that time despite being exposed by progressive and democratic people, his theory has seen several attempts at resurrection by the reactionaries, since they find this theory convenient to explain away the poverty inevitably resulting from the rule of the reactionary classes.

Neo-malthusians today say that food production etc. in the colonial and neo-colonial countries cannot keep pace with their growing populations. And therefore they proclaim population-control to be the principal issue facing the people of these countries. Thus the reality of the imperialist plunder and backward semi-feudal mode of agricultural production becomes just secondary side issue and sterilization of the people (whether by using the priest or the hangman) is presented as the burning issue. No wonder that neo-malthusian theories are popular with World Bank, A.I.D., the Club of Rome, various multinational foundations and reactionary propaganda organs (such as Universities, TV, media, movies etc.). An explanation of human misery in terms of an 'eternal law of nature' has an obvious appeal for political reactionaries since it diverts attention from the part played in the creation of this misery by class exploitation. As Engels points out "Why is too little produced? Not because of limits of production - even today and with present day means - are exhausted. No. But because the limits of production are determined not by the number of hungry bellies but by the number of purses able to buy and to pay". For example today the Indian ruling classes export grain to the Soviet imperialists and to Vietnam and have so much grain on their hands that they have resorted to storing it on airstrips and railway platforms; while hundreds of millions of Indian people are dying slowly of starvation.

Only by smashing the stranglehold of the two ruling classes of India - the imperialist-dependent capitalists and the feudal landlords - can the problem of hunger in

India be solved. Hunger is not the main issue in India today. Neither is it illiteracy, 'technology transfer', or religion or population. The main issue is the overthrow of the two ruling classes of India. The main issue is revolution.

Engels' comment "why is too little produced?" was made in 1865. Let us see how close we are today to the 'absolute physical limits' of the population that this planet can comfortably support.

Roger Revelle writing in Scientific American has estimated the world-wide potential for food production at the present level of technology. After taking into account the uneven distribution of water available for irrigation and variations in the climate, he calculates the potential gross area available for cropping. He concludes that "If 10% of this potential gross cropped area were set aside to grow fibers and other nonfood products, and if technology and purchased inputs to production (irrigation water, fertilizer, high-yielding seeds, plant protection, farm tools, farm machinery and farm practices based on scientific knowledge) equivalent to those used in Iowa corn farming were applied to the remainder, a diet based on 4,000 to 5,000 Calories of edible plant material could be provided for between 38 and 48 billion people, between 10 and 13 times the present population of the earth." (Scientific American, September 1974).

Table 1 gives the share of different regions in total world population from 1650 to 1976. As one can see, the share of Asia, Africa and Latin America in the world population has actually dropped by 5% over this period. And while the population of Asia, Africa and Latin America grew by a factor of 7 over this period, that of North America grew by a factor of 240 and of Europe and USSR, by a factor of 7.

The Neo-malthusians often talk about 'densely populated' backward agriculture countries. The population densities of several countries (1972) are shown in Table 2. Except for Bangladesh, all the poor countries in the table are less densely populated than many European imperialist countries in the table. If one compares number of people per tilled acre of land, we get table 3.

The colonial and neo-colonial countries do not compare badly with Japan, Netherlands and the U.K. By another estimate, in Japan there are 9 persons per cultivated acre, in Britain 5, in India there are 2. (D. Wilson, 'A quarter of mankind', Penguin, 1968).

It is promoted that people in India are poor because they have large families. The fact is that people have large families because they are poor. (see Mamdani, 'The Myth of Population Control', MR press, 1972). In India the motivation for having large families arises from definite material and social conditions faced by the masses of the people. In rural India, there is a seasonal labor shortage at times of harvesting and planting. At such times a large family is a great economic asset. Large families do cause land fragmentations. But the problem of fragmentation of land is the problem of the next generation. The peasant's major problem is to make a living off the land in his own lifetime, to meet the cost of production in the present generation. Poor peasants stand only a few steps away from material ruin. Their land holdings are already small; their total concern is with making ends meet in the present; with reducing their costs of production as much as possible. Given a very small income, to have to hire even one farm-hand can mean disaster. If such a peasant is merely to survive, he must rely on his family for the necessary labour power. Per acre of land, it is the peasant with the least land who needs the most labour, due to the lack of implements (see Mamdani, *ibid*). Furthermore, in remote Indian villages, the family provides almost the only form of physical security and old-age insurance. Thus the large families in rural India are the rational and intelligent response to the material and social conditions existing in present day India. History has shown that when people want to have fewer children because of a different set of material and social conditions, the population growth 'spontaneously' decreases (e.g. during industrialization of Europe). Even neo-malthusian authors like Paul Ehrlich have to admit this (see his Population Bomb, page 8).

As William Rich points out: "There is, however, striking new evidence that in an increasing number of poor countries (as well

Table1: Share Of Different regions in Total World Population (1650-1976)														
Year	World Total		Africa		Northern America		Latin America		Asia (excluding USSR)		Europe& USSR		Oceania	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
1650	545	100	100	18.3	1	0.2	12	2.2	327	60.0	103	18.9	2	0.4
1750	728	100	95	13.0	1	0.1	11	1.5	475	65.2	144	19.8	2	0.3
1800	906	100	90	9.9	6	0.7	19	2.1	397	43.9	192	21.2	2	0.2
1850	1171	100	95	8.1	26	2.2	33	2.8	741	63.3	274	23.4	3	0.2
1900	1608	100	120	7.5	81	5.0	63	3.9	915	56.9	423	26.3	6	0.4
1920	1810	100	148	7.7	117	6.5	91	5.0	967	53.4	486	26.9	9	0.5
1930	2013	100	155	7.7	135	6.7	109	5.3	1073	53.5	531	26.3	10	0.5
1940	2246	100	172	7.7	146	6.5	131	5.8	1213	54	572	25.5	11	0.5
1950	2495	100	199	8.0	168	6.7	162	6.5	1379	55.3	574	23.0	13	0.5
1955	2722	100	243	9.0	182	6.68	188	6.9	1492	54.8	604	22.2	14.1	0.52
1960	2986	100	273	9.14	199	6.66	216	7.23	1644	55.05	639	21.4	15.8	0.53
1965	3288	100	309	9.4	214	6.51	247	7.51	1824	55.5	676	20.55	17.5	0.53
1970	3610	100	352	9.75	226	6.26	284	7.84	2027	56.14	702	19.45	19.3	0.54
1975	3967	100	401	10.1	237	5.97	324	8.17	2256	56.87	728	18.35	21.3	0.54
1976	4044	100	412	10.2	239	5.90	333	8.23	2304	56.97	734	18.15	21.7	0.54

Ref:(1650-1950)estimates from "Population and Development" J.Pathy, Economic and Political Weekly, July 24,1976 and (1950-1976) from Demographic Year Book, 1978, p.115.

Table 2: Population Density per Sq. Km. (1972)

Country	Density
England & Wales	324
Netherlands	319
Belgium	317
Japan	280
Federal Republic of Germany	240
Italy	178
Bangladesh	425
India	104
Philippines	123
Indonesia	81
Pakistan	67.5

Ref. J.Pathy "Population and Development", Economic and Political Weekly, July 24,1976, p.1127

Table3: Number of People in relation to Tilled Acreage (1958-59)	
Country	Number of people per Acre of Tilled Land
Japan	7.4
Netherlands	4.4
Egypt	3.9
UK	2.9
China	2.5
Peru	2.4
Indonesia	2.0
Norway	1.7
Brazil	1.4
Italy	1.2
India	1.1
World	0.8
Mexico	0.7
Nigeria	0.6
US and USSR	0.38
Argentina	0.28
Australia and Canada	0.17

Ref: G.Borgstrom "The Hungry Planet", New York: Macmillan Co.1965,p.5.

as in some regions within countries), birth rates have dropped sharply *despite* relatively low per capita income and *despite* the absence or relative newness of family planning programs. The examination of these cases in this monograph reveals a common factor. The countries in which this has happened are those in which the broadest spectrum of the population has shared in the economic and social benefits of significant national progress than in most poor countries - or in most Western countries during their comparable periods of development. Family planning programs generally have been much more successful in those countries where increases in output of goods and social services have been distributed in such a way that they improved the way of life for a substantial majority of the population rather than just for a small minority.

The record also shows that those countries which continue to sustain high rates of population growth despite their achievement of relatively high per capita income figures have wide disparities in income and limited access to social services. Only a small group within these countries has started to practice fertility control; this group generally consists of the favoured minority that has benefited from the modern social and economic systems. The remainder of the society - those living at, or close to, the subsistence level - accounts for the high average birth rate." (William Rich, "Smaller Families through Social and Economic Progress", Monograph No. 7, ODC, 1973).

To the most casual observer of India, it is clear that there is no way the "broadest spectrum of population" can "share in the economic and social benefits of national progress" unless the utterly reactionary ruling classes of India are overthrown by the masses of the people.

As for the relationship between birth rate and development, it is only recently that a few of the colonial and neo-colonial countries have had birth rates in excess of 3 per cent. On the other hand, as early as 1880, England had a birth rate of 3.4 per cent, and the same trend was present in Germany as recently as 1904. Japan had a birth rate of more than 3.2 per cent in 1931. After analyzing similar data, J. Pathy con-

cludes that "there is no historical evidence that a high density of population was the force inhibiting development." (J. Pathy, "Population and Development" Economic and Political Weekly, July 24, 1976)

Much abuse has been heaped on the Indian peasant for his supposedly irrational attitude toward cattle ('cow-worship'). Several detailed studies show that these attitudes are firmly rooted in the economic realities in which the peasant finds himself and that "the religious belief derives power and sustenance from the material rewards it confers upon both men and animals" (quoted in Makhijani, "Energy and Agriculture in the Third World" Ballinger, 1975, p.74)

It is the feudal relations of production in Indian agriculture - the peasants living by subsistence farming while the parasitic landlords expropriate whatever meagre surplus they produce - that are the root cause of the backward state of Indian agriculture. About 140 million hectares of India's area of 320 million hectares is cultivated land. India therefore has a cultivated area comparable to that of the U.S. or China, although its total land area is about 40% as large as either country. Much of the world's poverty is concentrated in the rich alluvial plain of the Ganges river which consists of Bangladesh and the Indian states of U.P., Bihar and West Bengal. Only about 25% of India's cultivated land is irrigated. But in Bihar this figure falls to 10% though Bihar lies on an amazingly rich source of subterranean water in the Gangetic plain which is recharged by many snow fed and rain fed rivers. The irrigation systems, where they exist at all, are often old and unkept so only 20% of India's irrigated area gets sown more than once a year!

The Indian peasantry faces extremely harsh exploitation and feudal oppression by the landlord class. The Indian peasants live from hand to mouth on subsistence agriculture under backward or non-existent infrastructure (dams, irrigation, flood-control, fertilizers, electrical pumps for lift-irrigation etc.) and are deprived of what little surplus they produce by the feudal relations of production. As compared to more than 6 metric tonnes of grain per cropped hectare obtained in high technology farming, the

average Indian peasant produces only about a tonne.

Regarding the potential of modern agriculture in India, one estimate is as follows:

Using modern agricultural methods, scientific irrigation and farm mechanization, for the present average Indian diet of 2150 Calories/day, 410,000 Calories of fossil fuel energy per person will be required each year for food production - equivalent to 55kg of coal costing (at 1974 prices) \$2.50. That is about 1/4th of the per capita use of fossil fuel energy in India today. For the future diet of 3700 Calories of primary plant materials and the population of 1.2 Billion (instead of the present ~600 million) would be equivalent to 95 Kg of coal per person, or a total of 114 million tonnes/year. Estimated reserves of fossil fuels in India are between 100 to 1000 tonnes/person. Hence if India relied on her own fuel reserves, enough energy would be available for a modernized agriculture for several hundred years. Concurrent social advances will increase the energy demands to several times this amount, which can be handled by new energy technologies. Improved material and social conditions will naturally lead to stabilization of population. (Roger Revelle, Scientific American, Sept. 1974).

Besides land, there is the question of mineral and other resources. The problem of resources is a relative one. Resources are never fixed, except in the short run; over time they expand with social development and development of knowledge. Resource utilization is also a social phenomenon. It is the social structure which determines the importance of the different resources, allocates them and distributes them. Regarding the expansion of resources with social development and development of knowledge, it is enough to recall that the "same" resources that supported a population of 1 million at subsistence level in North America from 1650 to 1750 are today comfortably supporting a population of 240 million. About 10% of the U.S. work force, or less than 10 million workers in agriculture (including those engaged in the supply of fertilizers, tractors and so on to farmers), supply enough food for the 240 million people in the U.S. with enough left over for

substantial exports to other countries. In contrast 70% - 80% of the labor force is engaged in agriculture in colonial and neo-colonial countries. As regards resource-allocation, consider for example production of luxuries like TV's or whisky (from food grain!) for the Indian ruling classes; or the more than 5-fold expansion of the Indian police-budget since "independence"!

The central issue regarding hunger in India is not the problem of land or population. It is the problem of social relations or production. Indian agriculture is backward and semi-feudal in character. This is what holds back productivity, impedes the utilization of resources and an equitable distribution of social product. The imperialists and their Indian lackeys have a vested interest in maintaining the landlords as the social base of reaction in the Indian countryside.

History teaches us and life confirms that no ruling class has ever relinquished power even when faced with destruction. The Indian ruling classes are no exception. The grip of the landlords and the comprador bureaucrat capitalists on the Indian people cannot be loosened by petitions, exhortations for reforms, *satyagraha* or participating in the hoax of elections. The Indian ruling classes maintain their barbaric rule through reactionary violence (via the machinery of the police, para-military forces, jails etc.). This reactionary violence cannot be combatted by the people except through revolutionary violence - through armed struggle.

The principal contradiction in India today is that between feudalism in the countryside and masses of the Indian people. This feudalism is in collusion with the comprador bureaucrat capitalism (by this we mean the imperialist-dependent complex of private and public sector capitalism) in India. That is why the Indian revolution is anti-feudal and anti-imperialist in character. The working people of India, under the leadership of Indian proletariat shall smash the shackles of feudalism, comprador bureaucrat capitalism and imperialism (led by U.S. and Soviet imperialism), through revolutionary violence. This revolution will bring genuine democracy for the vast majority (95%) of the Indian people and establish their dictatorship over a handful of enemies.

That is why it is People's Democratic Revolution.

Through smashing semi-feudal relations of production in the countryside this revolution will usher in socialist relations of production in the Indian agriculture. For the first time in the written history of India, the limits of agricultural production will be determined not by the purses able to buy and pay but by the needs of the people.

The Indian Revolution is not just a distant prospect or aspiration. It is a practical problem taken up for solution. The party of the Indian proletariat, the Communist Party of India (Marxist -Leninist) is leading the Indian people on the path of Naxalbari, on the path of Armed Agrarian Revolution.

A genuine concern for hunger in India necessarily means full support for the People's Democratic Revolution in India. The propaganda that American working people should feel 'guilty' or 'barbaric' because "by our actions we deprive two-thirds of the world's population of enough food to survive and function normally", is completely baseless. It is the U.S. monopoly capitalist class (the U.S. imperialists), and their various lackeys who are the assassins and hangmen of the freedom-loving peoples of the world.

It is true that propping up reactionary regimes such as Shah of Iran, Pinochet in Chile or Desai regime in India directly serves the needs of U.S. and other imperialists. But there is nothing common in the interests of the working people of America and the interests of the U.S. monopoly capitalists. It is poison-mongering to blame the American working-people for the poverty, misery and oppression inflicted upon humanity by U.S. imperialism and its various local running dogs.

The greatest support that American people can give to the just struggle of Indian people is by organizing for revolution in their own country and dealing a deathblow to the monster of U.S. imperialism.

**DEATH TO U.S. IMPERIALISM,
SOVIET SOCIAL IMPERIALISM AND
ALL REACTION!**

LONG LIVE THE INDIAN REVOLUTION!

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