

India — A Country Suffering From Constant Food Shortages

NATURAL conditions in India are most favourable for developing agriculture. There is no bitter winter all round the year and the country has ample rainfall and its soil is fertile. For India to support her several hundred million people should not be a problem. But, under the reactionary rule of the Congress Party, India has suffered food shortages year after year, and this year's case also is one of crisis. Hungry people are to be seen everywhere. The picture of tens of millions of peasants struggling on the brink of death is a miserable one.

Sad Plight of Indian Peasants

Nine out of the 13 districts in the rice-growing state of Orissa are hard hit and over 8 million people have been affected by famine. More and more people are living on roots and wild fruit. The Indian bourgeois paper *The Statesman* revealed that even edible roots were hard to obtain in the Kashipur area of Koraput District in Orissa. At least 150 deaths due to starvation have already taken place there.

Reports on death from starvation have also leaked out from the Goalpara District in Assam State. Nobody there could obtain rice at the government-fixed price of 23 rupees per maund. In the "open market," very limited quantities of rice were sold at 80 to 90 rupees per maund. Over one million people in Assam are starving. In lower Assam, about 100,000 peasants have to go without food for days on end.

A serious famine occurred in 16 out of 19 districts in Mysore State. Half of the 26,000 villages in the state are hard hit by shortages. According to greatly reduced figures released by the reactionary Mysore State government, over 2,100,000 peasants in this state are famine victims.

In the 11 famine-stricken districts of Andhra State, it has been officially admitted, over a million landless farm labourers and poor peasants have no means of making a living. And this figure is likewise greatly reduced. In Bihar, Rajasthan and other states, the people are not only suffering from food scarcities but also

from a water shortage. Many have died of hunger and of thirst.

After visiting the Indian countryside, a correspondent of the British bourgeois paper *Sunday Mirror* wrote:

"I saw old people living on Gaya station in Bihar State, waiting for the daily delivery of sacks of corn, in the hope that a few grains would fall out of the sacks and enable them to scrape together a meal . . . even if it took three days.

"I saw a mother in Palamau appealing for more food as her child lay dying on her breast. As one Oxfam relief worker said: 'I honestly cannot believe when I look at their scarecrow arms and legs, that any of them are still alive.'

"I saw villages where the houses were crumbling back to the mud from which they were made. I saw children crawling on the ground looking for grass to eat themselves. And I saw the daily sight of the vultures circling in the sky. Waiting

"Out of the 500 million people in India, 200 million — yes, 200 million — are chronically undernourished. And the sight of children suffering from malnutrition is one it is impossible to forget. . . . Scaly skin, potbellies and thinning hair which ought to be jet-black and is going white; many of the children with eye and ear infections. An Indian government team in Hyderabad estimates that 80 per cent of the children under five in India are suffering from 'malnutritional dwarfism.'"

This is the miserable condition under which the Indian peasants live while struggling to exist.

Lies Cannot Cover Up Facts

However, the reactionary Indian Government is completely indifferent to the grave famine. It even has gone so far as to shamelessly fabricate lies to claim that there was a "bumper harvest" this year and that there were no deaths due to starvation. Indira Gandhi, the chieftain of this government, had the cheek to say that in three years' time India would no longer rely

on foreign aid for grain. Other high-ranking officials of the Indian Government have also talked big about this on other occasions.

Actually, this is only camouflage used by the reactionary Indian Government to cover up its crime and shirk its responsibility. At the very time it was exaggerating, it stretched out its begging hands for food from its U.S. master. It has been reported that the reactionary Indian Government would receive 3,500,000 tons of food grains from the U.S. Government in the second half of 1968. But because of the serious U.S. financial crisis, Washington has still not approved delivery. The Indian Government has repeatedly requested the United States to supply the promised food grains. Morarji Desai, Indian Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, recently journeyed to Washington for this purpose. He did all he could while he was there to slander China, saying that Chinese troops "have occupied" Indian territory and the Indian Government wanted to "push them out." His aim was to curry favour with New Delhi's master and in this way obtain some handouts. However, the United States does not have the strength equal to its will. Desai was sent off empty-handed. Upon his return to New Delhi, he admitted that the capitalist countries which had joined the "aid-India consortium," particularly the United States, are running into difficulty and are in no position to provide food grains or financial "aid" to India this year. Still he did not give up hope that after the November U.S. presidential election, the United States would continue to throw the Indian reactionaries some crumbs.

Desai's acknowledgement gave the lie to the reactionary Indian Government. All along the Indian reactionaries have relied on charity from U.S. imperialism to get along. According to available data, up to the end of 1965, India imported a total of over 37 million tons of food grains from the United States. In 1966, the amount reached more than 10 million tons. The dumping of U.S. grain disrupted India's agricultural production; the more grain imported, the bigger the difficulty for India. A 12 million ton food shortage was officially announced last year. It is estimated that between mid November and mid December this year, when old grain stocks run out and new grain is still not available, India's shortage will become even more acute. Nevertheless, the reactionary Indian Government intends to beg for more grain from U.S. imperialism next year.

Broad Masses of Indian Peasants Steadily Awakening

Year after year, the unending famines have led to the growing awakening of the broad masses of the

Indian peasants who have come to realize ever more clearly that the root-cause of their misery lies in the ruthless plunder and exploitation by the big landlords and bourgeoisie, who are hand in glove with U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism. The peasants in certain areas of West Bengal, Andhra, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh engaged in new struggles to seize land and oppose the Indian Government's reactionary rule. In the Nanpara sub-division of Bahraich District in northern Uttar Pradesh, for example, 5,000 impoverished and landless peasants took back some 21,000 acres of land from the big landlords despite police suppression. The peasants also reaped the standing crops on landlords' lands. Peasants forcibly took back 1,000 acres from the landlords in the Puranpur sub-division of Pilibhit District. In Unnao District near Lucknow, peasants occupied some 500 acres of land that the landlord class had robbed from the peasantry. Starving people in some areas are carrying on a struggle to seize grain. For instance, a crowd of some 200 starving people stopped a grain train by sitting down on the tracks near Gurpa station in Bihar State. They fought fiercely against the armed railway police who came to suppress them, and succeeded in carrying away grain from the train.

The food shortage and the awakening of the Indian peasants are harbingers of a new revolutionary storm on a larger scale.



Master and Slave