

views. For all one can surmise, a sizable portion of the invisible equity in Mrs Gandhi's government is controlled by the IJMA itself. So it has got to be business as ever.

## On Naxalbari

*A correspondent writes :*

Kanu Sanyal, the architect of the Naxalbari agitation, has been arrested at last. The police surprised him when he was asleep at a house in Birsinghote under Phansidewa police station on the morning of October 31. The man around whom a legend had begun to grow was completely unarmed. For more than eighteen months he had eluded the police. Despite reports that he had fled to Pakistan or Nepal, he had been living all these days in the Naxalbari area among the people. The police knew this and yet were unable to get at him. Last week's raid was not the first organised by the police to capture him ; at least on two previous occasions he had given the slip and the police had to return disappointed. Something must have gone wrong somewhere which enabled the police to arrest him ultimately.

Krishna Kumar (Kanu is an alias) will now face trial in 11 cases started against him by the police between March 4 and July 3 last year ; that is, the three-month period of the agitation after which the UF Ministry authorised police action in Naxalbari. The charges against him range from participation in illegal assemblies to murder, charges which will tend to identify him with those who are known in officialdom as anti-social elements. Much of what has been said or written about him also shows him in similar colours. The neglected and unknown area of Naxalbari where people have lived in dire poverty for generations is now internationally known, but despite the acres of newspaper space that have been devoted to the Naxalbari agitation not much has come out of what the peasants there sought to achieve.

Only a week before his arrest Kanu

Sanyal wrote an article in *Deshabarti*, the Bengali organ of the Communist Revolutionaries, setting out the aims and lessons of the Naxalbari movement. The article is, in effect, a report on the movement of the peasants of the Terai who have been painted to the outside world as no better than bandits. The movement, he says, has led to a polarisation of the political forces in the State and showed up every political party professing allegiance to peasants, workers and Marxism, in its true colours and proved that the leaders of the 14 Left parties in the United Front Government were enemies of a democratic, that is, agrarian revolution in India.

The first task of the Naxalbari peasants was to organise armed guards in the villages. Almost all villages were organised in the short period of one month in March-April last year ; the membership of the Kisan Sabha went up from a mere 5,000 to 40,000, of whom about 15,000 to 20,000 became activists. Within six weeks the revolutionary peasants had formed a peasants' committee in every village and trained up armed village guards. In fact, 50 per cent of the peasants were organised behind the movement. Kanu Sanyal has listed the measures taken by the revolutionary peasants to implement the decisions of the peasants' committees. Among them were : (1) Nationalisation of land in the Terai region and redistribution of all lands, except those of owner-cultivators, through the committees, (2) Bonfire of all land records, which are based on laws inimical to the peasants, (3) Cancellation of all mortgages and remission of loans taken by poor villagers from usurers and jotedars, (4) Confiscation of hoarded grains of village moneylenders and jotedars and distribution of confiscated foodgrains and movable property of jotedars among the peasants, (5) Public trial of jotedars known for tyranny and opposition to the peasants' movement and passing of death sentence on them, (6) Public trial of village roughs and parasites who sided with the jotedars and co-operated with the police and humiliating

them in public, (7) Raising of village guards armed with bows, arrows, spears, and guns looted from jotedars in preparation for the inevitable armed repression by the State, (8) Arrangements for night watch in villages, smooth running of schools, and deterrent punishment for theft and robbery, (9) Creation of regional revolutionary committees under a central revolutionary committee, and (10) Invalidation of bourgeois laws and courts and proclamation of the verdicts of the revolutionary committees as the law of the area.

The initiative in this agitation was in the hands of the landless peasants who form 70 per cent of the peasant population of the area. The middle peasants, who constitute another 20 per cent, had responded to the call for agitation with suspicion. In the first phase of the struggle they were not active participants, but they came forward when they realised that the struggle was in their interest and against the landlords, jotedars, and moneylenders. The remaining 10 per cent, who were rich peasants, had, in the beginning, opposed the movement. But when the jotedars fled and the small and middle peasants united, they gave up the path of opposition and criticism and began to ask for justice from the peasant committees. The committees considered every case thoroughly and did justice to them. As a result, the rich peasants were generally neutral but in many cases active participants in the struggle.

Kanu Sanyal says that the Terai peasants by arming themselves and accomplishing their ten-point programme had ended the age-old feudalism in the area and ushered in the "rule of revolutionary peasant committees". Their struggle was not an armed struggle for land but for State power. The Marxist Communists characterised this struggle against feudalism as a struggle for redistribution of land and, like all "bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties", they also looked at the question from the point of view of justice to peasants. That is why they staged a "farce" in the name of land redistribution through pro-jotedar bu-

reaucracy. But the peasants of the Terai did not waver, for they knew that their struggle was not for land alone.

### Setback

Discussing the reasons for the setback, "though temporary", in the struggle he says one of the inadequacies was the lack of a powerful party organisation thoroughly armed with Maoism, completely identified with the people, unshamed of self-criticism, and skilled in Marxist-Leninist tactics. They had not accepted Maoism unconditionally; though the peasants and workers of the Terai were in a majority in the party, they were under petty bourgeois leadership. In the beginning of the struggle the party members were active, but when it developed into a mass movement they were unable to play their role. Opportunism and escapism stalked the members and even the militant among them began to vacillate.

Another reason was their lack of abiding faith in the people and their failure to give the movement a powerful mass base. The leaders did not realise that the people were the makers of history; in spite of what the revolutionary peasant masses had accomplished, the leaders had no faith in them. The petty bourgeois leadership became a drag on the people and resisted whenever the "heroic peasant masses" tried to do something on their own. Accustomed as they were as members of a revisionist party to bourgeois laws and ways, the leaders tried to lecture the peasants on what was right and wrong. As a result class conflict was blunted and it was not possible to create a mass base for the movement which more than 40,000 peasants had supported actively.

The third reason, according to Kanu Sanyal, was their ignorance of tactics of struggle and habit of antiquated thinking. In the first phase of the struggle the leaders indulged in idle dreams, a legacy of their association with a revisionist party. On the one hand, they thought that the UF would not go this far, and, on the other, they minimised the strength of the "enemy" and kept the people unprepared to

face the enemy. This is nothing but revisionist attitude. Again, when the people had prepared themselves for an attack on the enemy after assessing his strength, they thought of the consequences. As a result, in the face of widespread terrorism the people became disorganised and militancy yielded place to escapism.

After the people had been armed and jotedars and vested interests had fled the villages, the leaders took it for granted that base areas had been created. They mistook armed people for a people's militia. Only in a few cases armed bands were created to loot the guns of jotedars, but this was never accepted as one of the main tactics of the struggle; on the contrary, they thought that guerilla bands would grow out of the masses spontaneously; in many cases the responsibility of forming armed bands was entrusted to tramps because of their rebellious attitude. Again, when a section of rich peasants and small jotedars sided with the poor and middle peasants, the leaders thought the peasants were all united, forgetting that in the time of terror the former might desert to the enemy camp and strike at the latter.

The lesson Kanu Sanyal learnt from the experience of the struggle is that the people in the villages would have to be politically awakened and armed; they would then become village guards. The effort for a people's militia will have to be supplemented by armed uprising of peasants in some areas. The greatest achievements of the mass movement in the Terai were formation of revolutionary peasant committees, centrally and regionally, and land redistribution. But the far-reaching implications of these two acts were not realised by the leaders. In future, Kanu Sanyal said, they would place the greatest emphasis on this programme of wresting political power and revolutionary land reform.

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