

SARVODAYA *and* COMMUNISM

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"I believe that ultimately it will be Gandhism with which Communism will have its trial of strength". Thus had Vinobaji stated in his introduction to "Gandhi and Marx" by the late Sri K. G. Mashruwala in 1950. Who could have thought that Vinobaji himself inspired through the Bhoodan Yagna would have ventured to meet the challenge of the Communism in Telengana in 1951? Bhoodan Yagna which has now culminated in Gramdan and Gramraj has been practical Gandhism or Sarvodaya in action through non-violence. Vinobaji has been consistently trying to win over the Communists through love and reason. This small brochure presents some of the questions and doubts of the Communists and Vinobaji's answers to them at the various stages of the movement. It is a happy historical co-incidence that "constitutional Communism", the first of its kind in the world, in the words of Vinobaji, was functioning when he entered Kerala State. The discussions compiled here will show the Sarvodaya approach particularly to the land problem as distinct from the other.

Gandhiji's answer to a Communist and an article on the Tamil Poet Subramania Bharathi's clear vision of village republic through Gramdan as early as 1917 are included as appendices.

Tanjore, }
18-9-1957 }

SARVODAYA PRACHURALAYA
(Akhila Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh)

Complimentary Copy



Appeal to Communists

I

TODAY I will answer some questions put by Communist friends who, I am glad to know, are working here. I want them to work on right lines. I want to assure them that I am as much anxious for the emancipation of India's down-trodden as they are. Like them I am also eager for the salvation of the masses and my endeavour goes on in that direction. Hence I seek their co-operation. There is some difference of opinion between them and me. But difference of opinion is inevitable in such a vast sub-continent as India. But as far as the service of the poor is concerned I hold them in as much love as the Communists do and that is why I long for their co-operation. If they feel that this is a good way to tackle the problem of poverty I would expect them to offer me their helping hand.

Their question is: instead of taking land-donations from the poor, why should they not be taken from the feudal aristocrats, Rajas, Navabs, Kulaks or rich peasants only?

My answer is: I do not want to avoid any one of them. I will take lands from all of them. But my asking land from all does not mean I ask equal lands from all. From the average peasants I want one-sixth. To big peasants and zamindars my request is to keep a little for themselves and donate the rest to me. And from those who are very poor the little they would give I would accept as blessings or *prasad*. As Lord Krishna

was delighted at the few paddy grains offered by Kuchela so also Bharat-mata is delighted when these poor folk give even a small amount since that is an expression of love. I would go on demanding till all the landless in the country are provided with land. Frequently I am asked the reason of accepting gifts of the poor. I am always glad to reply to it since it helps in the propagation of the ideal. There are four distinct reasons why I accept land from the poor :

(1) Today the most unhappy in the society are the landless. Compared to them, poor peasants are in a happier state. After all when we call one man happy and the other unhappy we do so by contrast. Should one look towards those below, one would find himself happy, while should *he* look towards those above he would find himself unhappy. Therefore, everybody must make some sacrifice for the sake of those who are the most distressed in society even as all water of the globe flows towards the sea standing at the lowest level. Both the mountain-water and the plains-water run towards the sea. Should we ask the plains-water, "Why dost thou, of low level, flow towards the sea?" it would reply, "Compared to the sea I am on a higher level and therefore I must run towards the sea." Likewise, as it is the duty of the well-to-do to give something for the landless, so also is the duty of the poor kisan, because from the point of view of the landless, he is somewhat better off. Hence it is enjoined upon all to do something or other for the landless. This is what I want to inculcate. Otherwise we would find that one who has got a small portion of land has no duty to fulfil. But every-

body has a duty to fulfil. Suppose I have not enough pieces of bread with me, but if any hungry man comes to my door while eating, it is then my duty to give him a part of what I have. I want the society to imbibe this spirit.

(2) My ultimate object is to impart the lesson that land belongs to God alone. Today like the well-to-do who regards himself the master of the land he owns, the poor man also regards himself the master of his little bit. Both recognise themselves as the owners or masters of land. I want to relieve both of them of this feeling of ownership. As we must give water to the thirsty, so also we must give land to the tiller who demands it because I want to bring it home to the people that all land belongs to God. Today both the rich and the poor suffer from the ownership-complex. And verily, a Babaji residing in a forest has as much attachment to the loin-cloth he owns as the rich man has to his heap of clothes. I, therefore, want that everybody should get rid of this attachment.

(3) When we ask the rich to part with their land we must command some influence over them. But how to command it? Have we any power? Do we keep a pistol? We neither keep one nor trust in its power. We believe that a pistol never solves any issue; nay, it spoils it. I, therefore, seek to create moral strength. Should thousands of poor men offer their gifts it would give rise to a moral power that would affect the rich. This is actually happening. Formerly, the rich used to avoid or bypass me, but you see how much land they

gave me in Hazaribagh. Why so? Because when the poor have been donating land to me for the last two years it created a sense of shame in the rich. And shame can move the shameless. The Shastras say: "*Hriya deyam*" (*Should be given with modesty*).

This is a way to develop moral power. I trust that the rich people would take to my work more and more. When the Raja who donated one lakh acres saw me I told him that he had done good to donate but that alone would not serve the purpose and that he should perform the duty of making others of his group part with more lands. He accepted my view and I hope that the rich people would slowly take up my work because a moral power is being built up on account of the offerings of the poor.

(*Sarvodaya*—July, '53)

II

THE NON-VIOLENT ARMY

I have frequently said that we are raising our own army. We have to wipe out the differences of high and low and raise such an army as may enable us to take up a fight on its strength. Our soldiers would be those who have made donations or done some sacrifice or showed sympathy in our work. Ours is not an army of violence in which those with 32" wide chest are recruited. For an entry into our army one should have a chest of

sacrifice. In case the rich do not open their hearts in future I would go one step further ahead. I have never imposed upon me the restriction that we would not move a step further than what we are doing today ; I do not believe in such restrictions. Ours should be a force of rigour of love. Oh ! how much sacrifice does the mother undergo for the child ! She prepares food for the child. But when she finds that her son is going the bad way she is pained. What does she do then ? Nothing but Satyagraha. She takes to fasting and gently brings the son round. Satyagraha consists in bringing others round by self-suffering and without inflicting any pain on others.

WHAT IS SATYAGRAHA ?

When I mention the word Satyagraha I do not intend to threaten you. I know Satyagraha can be abused and it is being done so frequently these days. But I earnestly hold that a conduct of truth must be insistently followed so that others' heart may melt. Satyagraha is the preparation to offer any sacrifice for this conduct. And I maintain that if there is one true Satyagrahi in the world he will produce his influence on the whole world and the heart of the latter will irresistibly melt. But he must bear love towards the entire globe.

On the other hand we find today fasts undertaken for every little work, even for province-formation. This is all wrong since we do see that it produces such reactions as are in complete variance with the original object. Only that fast is true which results in awakening the

feeling of love in all hearts. That fast is false which results in producing such untoward reactions as envy and disputes. Fast is to be undertaken only when we bear love towards the one against whom we fast and who should feel ashamed of his conduct. After the fast he must have a feeling that he was wrong and wicked. Should the person against whom I fast or offer Satyagraha be one not so moved in his heart, I must be regarded as an untrue or superficial Satyagrahi. I am a true Satyagrahi only when the other party is made to feel that I have true love for him in my heart.

Therefore, do not be afraid when I talk of Satyagraha. I say this for clarity of thought and my feeling is that all that I have been doing for the past two years is a sort of Satyagraha. I have also studied Satyagraha and tried to follow it to some extent. Satyagraha never means doing something against someone on a particular occasion. Merely opposing somebody is not Satyagraha. So all that I have been doing—going round on foot, explaining the idea to the people from village to village and asking for land—is Satyagraha itself.

It is wrong to assume that only a pistol can prove violent. A fast can be as much violent. I believe that my army would prove to be so mighty and strong that it would not require to fight, nor to shoot any arrow. It has been said that the opponent gets vanquished even at the mere sound of the bugle. So also would the bugle of our army be effective. When lakhs of poor men give donations a battle would not be necessary. In Hazaribagh I got four and a half lakh acres. But I said that

the same did not satisfy me. I, therefore, asked the workers there to execute 60,000 *dan patras* which they agreed to. Why am I doing this? When God had to lift the Govardhan he asked all to apply their 'lathi' (or stick) below it. So I accept gifts from the poor because this is the work to create popular sanction and strength.

If the Communist brothers would think over the matter deeply they would find that there is no better way to create the popular power.

Question II: Why don't you ask all leaders, ministers and members of Parliament etc. who own land to donate?

Answer: Today people forget their own duty, yet remember that of others. But I try to bring home to all their own duty. You well know that they are going round asking land for me. Do you think people are so ignorant as not to ask them, before giving their donations, what they have themselves given? Therefore rest assured that when they have taken to my work they would have undoubtedly donated some land. But I am not aware whether they have given enough land or not. Once a man lets me in I am not going to stay on in his courtyard only, rather I would go straight to the kitchen with a request for food to meet my hunger. So when somebody opens the door for me it means I get a place in his household. I feel that the leaders of Bihar having taken to this work would have donated at least one-sixth of their own land.

METHOD OF DISTRIBUTION

Question III: Should not land be distributed only through the committees consisting of peasants and labourers?

Answer: It directly means that the poor should get land. But there is no reason to raise any misgivings about the distributing system. I have formed such rules and regulations for it as to leave no room for doubts or partiality. Land would go positively to the landless. Its going to someone else would imply a breach of trust as there are rules of land-distribution. What is quite likely is that in lieu of Ram, land may go to Krishna. But both of them would be landless in any case. Possibly, of the two one who does get land may have some grievance in his heart. But I imagine that some way would be found out for him also in such a big movement as this. In case the land-owners are given land that means a betrayal of confidence. I am working on right lines and that through agricultural labour committees alone. Indeed ours would be a committee but without any power. The only reward its members would get would be that of walking on foot. They would have to go from village to village and study the lands donated. My method is such as to make the landless select from among themselves those who should get land. In case there is sufficient land all of them would get it. If not, we would beg for more lands in the open meeting and then it would suffice for all. My experience is that on such occasions love springs up in people's heart and they do donate. Our entire work

would be carried out in public meetings, and nothing in private. We would ask the landless to select some from amongst themselves. None other would have the right to make this selection. Since there is truth in the heart of the poor, they themselves speak out as to who is poorer among them and hence more deserving of land. I am not talking in the air. I say it from my own experience that one landless withdraws his name in favour of another landless. Should they fail to do so we have a toss then and there. This method assures that the land would go only to the landless. As all this is done openly and the friend putting this question would also be there. The members of the Communist party of India should be present there. Suppose I am the distributor, I would ask you, "Have all the landless assembled here? If not, why did you not bring them here? I would hold you guilty of negligence." It only means my work would not be complete as long as my Communist brothers do not feel satisfied.

CEILING OR FLOORING?

Question IV: Should there not be a ceiling of land as pointed out by the Kumarappa Committee?

Answer: The Committee recommends that the amount of ceiling should be three times the land to be duly owned by a cultivator. My friend who has posed this question wants to convey that we should move the Government for this. I sympathise with his observation. But I want to tell my innocent brother that this much alone would not suffice. I want to explain to my good

friends of the Communist Party of India that fixation of ceiling does not help us seriously. I saw in Ranchi that many have distributed land among their relatives as soon as the idea of ceiling went in the air! If we say that 25 acres are the limit, it means that a family can own 200 acres. When all this came to my notice I concluded that the ceiling would not prove beneficial to the handless at any rate. I, therefore, want to impress upon my Communist friends that they are on the wrong track. If you want to do anything for the poor begin with flooring. First resolve that every cultivator must have at least five acres of land.

(*Sarvodaya—August, '53*)

Mobilise the Goodness of all

III

REPLYING to questions raised by some communists in a letter addressed to him, Vinobaji deprecated the tendency of Communists to resort to violence even if the objective was within reach of achievement without struggle.

He said Communists would rather accept a stone achieved through struggle than a piece of bread secured through persuasion and change of heart. They did not realize that by insisting upon struggle and struggle alone, they (Communists) divided society into two distinct classes, the rich and the poor. There were good men and bad men on both sides. His method was to secure the goodwill and sympathy of both sides.

Acharya Vinoba pointed out how by converting his opponents to his views he definitely gained their sympathy and support. On the other hand, the communist way of treating good and bad men alike, deprived them of sympathy and support of good men on the opposite side, who by their presence minimized the evil forces and gained the support of their camp. Thus the Communists were losers as a matter of fact. They hopelessly betrayed lack of diplomacy.

He warned them that it was useless to expect elimination of goodmen belonging to other camps. He asserted that there was no reason to disbelieve the sincerity of rajas and big zamindars, as the Communists did, for they (the rajas and big zamindars) would dig their own grave if they thought of deceiving him. He knew how sincerely they were moving from place to place for the Bhoodan Yagna.

In case, however, they deceived him, he said, they would be exposed. If he could win them over—and he had no doubt that he could—it would undoubtedly be a great gain. In any case the poor could only be gainers and not losers. He invited Communists to accompany him and see for themselves the tremendous awakening among the landless, who thronged in their thousands to listen to his message. They knew their claim to land was established and that they were sure to secure land.

Communists themselves first misunderstood the Bhoodan movement as antagonistic to their movement but were now slowly appreciating his efforts and had stopped

opposing them. What was that if not a change of heart? He was hopeful of receiving greater support from them.

Referring to their objection to the acceptance of donations from poor and small land-holders, Acharya Vinoba said he wanted to eliminate the sense of ownership which existed equally amongst the big and small. He wanted all to realize that they had to surrender their rights to society. Communists did not realize that by accepting donations from small land-holders he was mobilizing a great force—a non-violent army—which would not lag behind in responding to his call of satyagraha if and when necessary.

He wanted Communists to study the progress of his movement and see how it worked. While some people believed in the necessity of the State for all times, he was one with Marx so far as the idea of a stateless society was concerned.

He also wanted the State to wither away. It was a different matter that Communists believed in the necessity of a strong centralized State prior to its withering away. He wanted the State to wither away through decentralization of power.

He said: "I am not a member of any party. My name is not even on the register of the Sarvodaya Samaj. I would gladly join the Communist Party if it convinced me of its ideology."

Mental Transformation

IV

IT is about two and a half years since I began to be in personal contact with Communists. In Telengana, where I started this Yagna, I met some of them in jails and others in the distant villages where they were working. I had discussions with them and all along I have been telling them that I consider them as friends. Even though their ideological approach to the problems of our country and also of the world, is entirely different from mine, I have been assuring them that I consider them not as enemies but as friends.

It is a fact that they desire the uplift of the poor and there are many among them who are up to any sacrifice for the same. I am also anxious to serve the poor and so it is that which makes me claim their friendship. My mind is always open to conviction and if in case they can convince me the soundness and correctness of their approach and ideology, I am prepared to join hands with them. I wish they may also keep their mind open as I do, so that I may try to convince them the correctness of my stand and what I aim at.

They were telling, in the very beginning of this Bhoodan Yagna, that it was a wrong step and it was directed against them. Subsequently when they found that the ideal behind it began to spread, the people got awakened and began to offer Dana-patras and this awakening

in India began to produce its own effect on other countries of the world, some among them came forward to show their sympathy. A few of them received me with welcome addresses and offered even gifts of lands.

Their great leader Sri Gopalan has now clearly stated that the Communists consider this movement good even though it would not produce the result that I expect. He states that legislation alone can solve the land problem. This statement of Sri Gopalan is, of course, a result of mental transformation to some extent. It is not proper for anyone to claim that he cannot be mentally transformed. If anyone does so it shows that he is lifeless, not alert or sensible. I don't think that the Communists are devoid of life.

CAPITALISTS AND COMMUNISTS

The Communists have stated again, "For certain special reasons we have no faith in this Bhoodan movement as it would, instead of solving, make the land problem more complicated." Of course everyone is entitled to express his free opinion. The capitalists also are not in favour of this movement. The capitalists think that this movement will lead to the disintegration of land into uneconomic units resulting in loss to the nation. Here as also on many other points, both of them join hands. Both desire and believe in centralised production. They differ only in the methods of distribution. The capitalists want distribution to be done according to the individual's capacity to buy, whereas Communists say it should be equal to all. But I say

that production should be decentralised. Both of them are against this. The Communists have now begun to say "There are some weaknesses in your movement. So we can't have any faith in it." It looks they would place faith in this movement if the so-called weakness is not there.

The Communists say "You consider that mental transformation of the rich can be done but organising the poor into unions is violence." I have never said that the poor should not be organised and there should not be awakening in them. In fact I claim that such an awakening as has happened among the poor during these two years of this Bhoodan movement, had not happened at any time before. Thousands of landless people come to hear us. They have understood that, on their behalf, I am claiming their right. I am not begging but I am claiming their share as a matter of right as a representative of the poor in our country.

I have been always stating that land is the gift of God just like sun, air and water and nobody can claim ownership to it. The very objective of Bhoodan Yagna is to make the people realize this ideal. People listen to me and when they realize the truth of the ideal, they offer me lands as gift so that it may be distributed to the landless peasants.

THE TECHNIQUE OF BHOODAN

Let my Communist friends understand that I do want to awaken and uplift the poor. I tell the poor, "Don't

break your head.” I desire to strengthen them and lift them higher and higher. I search and find out among the rich as to who are the real enemies of the poor in them. But the Communists consider everyone among the rich as an enemy of the poor. This attitude makes the good as well as the bad among the rich join together with the result the wicked among them gain more strength.

Even if the good among them is only 10% their sympathy, if alienated, will naturally go to add to the strength of the 90% of the wicked amongst them. Therefore through non-violent means I discriminate all the good persons in them and withdraw them to the side of the poor. They who do not know how to exercise discretion, know neither political nor moral science.

In Mahabharata there is the story of ‘serpent sacrifice’. All the serpents were killed. The one by name Thakshaka alone escaped death, for he hid himself behind Lord Indra. When the priest came to know that Thakshaka had the added strength of Indra he repeated the manthra “Let both Indra and Thakshaka be killed”. But Indra could not be killed because he is immortal; so Thakshaka also couldn’t be killed and he became immortal. It couldn’t be that everyone in any group or party will be bad and wicked. Among the rich though there are many who are bad, there will be at least some who are good. So to consider all alike is not proper. The Communists do not understand what strategy we use to discriminate the good from the bad.

The Communists want everyone to be destroyed. I have withdrawn some Rajas from the rich and they are now working actively for Bhoodan. The wrestler has to wrestle with his adversary in front. I am now in a wrestle with the Rajas and the big Zamindars. If I am defeated, of course the Communists' stand will be justified and they can say that the rich, cent per cent of them, are wicked and so Vinoba was defeated. But if I happen to be the victor, the poor are the people to be benefited. In either case the Communists will not lose anything.

The Communists are saying that the big landlords give me only hilly and useless lands. But I may tell them that I am doing Hanuman's work. I go to the feet of Lord Rama lifting the whole mountain. Let Him take whatever medical herbs he desires. I have told the big landlords in Bihar that I will take 32 lakhs of acres of good land from them. Yet if they give me waste lands also I will certainly take, for it forms part of the mother country and is dear to me. The donor of course gives up his ownership over it and that is what I aim at.

The Rajas have given me good lands too. If they deceive me what do I lose? They will get exposed by themselves. The poor will only be benefited if their enemies disclose themselves. Who else is there in the world is to save the Rajas other than those who believe in Sarvodaya ideals?

Communists ask me why I receive lands from the poor. They do not know how to fight. My objective is to do

away the sense of ownership. The sense of ownership is not only in the minds of the rich, but it is in the middle-class people as well as in the poor. I want everyone to be rid of that feeling. Even the Zamindars will have to be provided lands in distribution.

It could be only a Rama-Ravana battle if all the good people are pitched on one side and all the bad on the opposite side. In such a fight there cannot be any peace or settlement. But if there are good people on either side there cannot be a full and pitched up fight. I desire to have a full fight.

I want to have all the hoarders and misers on one side and all the kind and generous people on the other side. If at all any conflict comes let it be between the misers and the generous. I too am ambitious to win and it is for that I am preparing. I am sure to be victorious in my fight but the Communists cannot. I don't desire any conflict and fight. But if anyone throws a challenge to fight, I will fight till he is completely routed.

THREE KINDS OF PRESSURE

Pressure is of three kinds. They are (1) pressure by the threat of violence, (2) pressure by the sanction of law and (3) moral pressure by the strength of good public opinion. The last I welcome. I have never said that I will not hesitate to accept it in my effort to bring about the mental transformation in men. The Communist friends now state that through legislation alone we could solve the land problem. May

I ask them from where the force in law emanates? Is it from the people or from the military? You did not even bring about any change in the ideological outlook of the people. How then can the sanction of law come in and have its force in society?

Marx has said: The power of the State will be captured by the poor people to begin with, but in the end "the State will wither away." This means that there will be no State authority towards the end and the governance of the country will go on without the interference or function of any central power. If the Communists respect this maxim enunciated by Marx, then they have to believe in the goodness in man and trust the people. This was a practical proposition to Marx and he believed that it could be practised in the immediate future and not after a lapse of a million years. If the goodness in man is not relied upon, the State will never wither away at any time and its authority will continue for ever. Our Communist friends now say that the State should be made very strong now and all power should be concentrated at the centre. This they call as the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat.' They proclaim that the State will wither away in the end in spite of this dictatorship in the present days. How?

The Sarvodaya ideologists also believe in the total disappearance of the State authority in the end. To achieve it they believe that the weakening of the central power should begin even from today. Decentralization of the power of the State should begin

even now. Without it, State will never disappear at any time. I ask the Communists on what fundamental they base their proposition that the State will wither away in the end. Is it not on the truth that there is goodness in the hearts of men?

(*Sarvodaya—Mar.-April, '54*)

Meet Communism with Bhoodan

V

TO these youths, partly excited and partly disillusioned, I want to convey that the class against which they are labouring so hard will never survive. But their shouting against it will give it a lease of life. If the rich or the 'haves' of India thrive, the attitude of the Communists would be held responsible for it. If they change their attitude and give the opportunity to the rich and the poor here to give vent to their generous nature, the rich class would disappear. If my Communist friends cast off their label and work as 'man' they will, like me, get entry into every house of the country. When I was in Telangana I told them so and appealed to them to come out in the open. Also I then told the official army that Communists were no beasts that could be hunted out by a gun. They are not 'sher' or lion but '*Chinta-shoor*' (brave of thought), having the power of an ideology and the support of a book and that they could not be wiped out by violence. The only way to tackle

them is to tackle the evil or misery which irritates them. We must effectively attack poverty and want. People try to reply the Communist in vain. I know that not words but action is the only answer to them. The ideology of the Communists must be faced by a positive ideology and sound action. If the rich people of Bengal take up the 'Bhoodan Yajna' movement and donate one-sixth of their property the suspicion of the Communists will vanish. But if these people would avoid Bhoodan and evade us I want to know where they can find a safe corner! If the rich are afraid of the Communists, of Government, of robbers and thieves and also of me, where and how shall they live? I, therefore, humbly appeal to the rich not to be afraid of me and liberally participate in the Bhoodan Yajna. They would then find that they need not be afraid of the Government, nor of robbers and thieves and the Communists too would wax eloquent at the uniqueness of our Indian culture.

One meets several cases of rich men having Communist sons. I am not surprised at it. For, I have often said that it is the Capitalists who are the parents of Communists. This is a quarrel between the father and the son which would be mutually settled. I am, therefore, afraid of neither the Capitalists nor the Communists. In U. P. Communists gave me both 'manapatra' (Welcome address) and 'danapatra' (Land gift). They had observed in their address that though they had no faith in my method yet they would change their opinion if it succeeded. I hope that the rich community would grasp the truth that here is a chance

for it to earn the leadership of the society. If they take to the service of the poor they can do a lot. 'Bhoodan Yajna' is like a bridge to unite all. I want the people of Bankura to stand up and unitedly fulfil the Bhoodan quota of one lakh 'danpatras' and one lakh acres of land. As charity begins at home, let each of you give your share first and then carry this message from door to door.

(*Sarvodaya—March, '55*)

Communists' Interview

VI

WHY NOT ORGANISE THE LANDLESS ?

REPLYING of the query of the Communists whether it would not be advisable to organise the landless instead of walking from village to village and house to house for collecting land gifts, Vinobaji explained :

"Our meetings are attended by both the landless and the landed. We present our demand for land as a right and in the capacity of a representative of the landless. As a result, a tide of awakening is evident in the landless of this country. The sales of land have received a set-back because people are confident that they will receive land through Bhoodan. In Orissa the Gram-dan movement has presented a unique change. Not one or two but all the land-holders in seven

hundred villages have surrendered their right of ownership in favour of the society. Could this happen without the awakening of the landless? The deer take to its heels when we try to hunt the tiger. Similarly, the landholders easily understand our point of view when we speak to them as representatives of the landless."

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The Communist friends pointed out how they did not believe in the collective transformation of the society as a whole through the process of Bhoodan though they admitted its efficacy in bringing about a change in the selected few.

Appreciating their point of view Vinobaji said that his was the mission to create a universal awakening and without an exception. That was exactly why he demanded and accepted donations from the poor also. He was, as a matter of fact, trying to form a society which would voluntarily renounce its ownership, at least in part if not in full. It will be an army which will have its moral effect on the society as a whole. That the process has its desired effect has been amply manifested in Bihar, where the price of land has come down below mark. This is not all. The Government of Bihar wanted to fix a ceiling of 30 acres; but their proposed legislation provided facility to retain 300 acres of land in the name of good management. The Bhoodan movement brought such a pressure on the Government that the suggestion had to be given up

totally. The movement thus has its moral effect also. Our approach, therefore, is four-fold. First we try to create the awakening among the people. Secondly, try to bring about a change of heart in the landholders. Thirdly, we try to bring pressure on the Government and last but not least, we want to raise a non-violent army to be ready to make necessary sacrifices, in case all the above three-fold attempts do not bear the desired fruit."

"The success of our mission," continued Vinobaji, "depends on our efficiency and on the intensity of our work. There is however no room for any mis-understanding about our goal". Vinobaji made it clear that he did not consider it either a sign of merit or of strength to be either a landless or a poor. "Are there not men among the landless and the poor" he asked, "who are addicted to drink, and void of character, cleanliness, and what not? Our mission is therefore, to convey our ideas to them and inspire them to give to the society whatever they possess—land, wealth, energy, talent, everything. The various gifts mentioned through these process of self-purification will qualify even the poorest of the countrymen, to enroll himself, in the non-violent army, which we want to form."

CHANGE OF FAITH AMONG COMMUNISTS

Regarding their lack of faith in the theory of change of heart, Vinobaji pertinently asked if they themselves did not stand as an illustration of such a change. For, during his first Telangana tour the Communists not

only had no faith in this movement but had actively opposed it in various ways. Today this position had changed, and they were now convinced at least of the goodwill of the man as well as his mission ; and hence the sympathy that was so much evinced by them in the mission. Vinobaji gave another illustration also. In the beginning, even the constructive workers did not believe that the land-owners would donate lands to any one else, except to Vinobaji. They were therefore, feeling shy of asking land-donations. "But don't you see now that even the humblest of the workers does not return empty handed? Would you not call this, a change in their minds?" he asked. The Congress in the beginning tried to find fault with the movement and went to the length of calling it as contrary to the constitution of India because it advocated elimination of personal ownership. But today the same Congress declared that the responsibility of the movement rested not on Vinoba alone but on all of them. Did not Pandit Nehru declare that the Government could not free itself of its responsibility because of this movement? All this change had come about in four year's time. Let us compare it to the prolonged struggle of twenty-five years in China, and you will at once realise the influence and the potentiality that the movement has commanded within such a short period. The problem of land is not a small problem. The great awakening that is becoming evident among the masses today does demand serious thinking." he added.

Referring to the different political parties in the country, Vinobaji pointed out that as a matter of fact,

there existed not many but only two parties—the generous and the miserly. And the latter had penetrated in all the parties. It would indeed be a great achievement if the Communist party got rid of the niggardly element in them. He did not want to reserve to himself what he commonly observed these days that if in a family the father was a Congressman, one of his sons was a Communist while the other, a Socialist, so that the family was always in an advantageous position whichever party came to power. Like a section of the Hindus who, in spite of their intense indulgence, did not hesitate to claim themselves as Hindus, the stingy element in the political parties claimed loyalty to their organisations. If the parties are but purged of this element, their organisation will indeed be strong even if the membership is counted in hundreds instead of in thousands. “Bogus members whether they are Communists or Congressmen do not and cannot indeed add to the strength of their respective parties.” he asserted.

(Sarvodaya—February, '56)

VII

Sarvodaya and Marxism

In the workers' meeting at Neyyatinkara, Vinobaji's second camp in Kerala, the representative of the "Kerala Janata" a Daily, put a few questions to Vinobaji who answered them at length. The following is the gist.

Question: Is there a possibility of a compromise between Sarvodaya and Marxism?

Vinobaji: Marxism is not an *ism* that can be translated into practice ignoring the nature of surrounding conditions and environments. It is a method of application. It has to undergo changes according to altered conditions and circumstances of each place.

In Russia, the revolution was carried on not exactly on the same line as enunciated by Marx. In China, we saw the adoption of another form different from that used by Russia. In the altered conditions and circumstances of each place and in response to the demand of the times, Marxism has to change its methods. We all know that Marxism was born in Europe at a time when capitalism was in its worst phase and it was this *ism* that was employed to combat it. This itself shows its application is always subject to adjustments and changes.

But Sarvodaya is an ideal of life. It is ever ready and anxious to receive and absorb everything that is good in other ideologies and *isms*. Sarvodaya is a free ideology embracing and comprehending the entire life. It is not simply born to combat or compete with any particular ideology. It moves onward from day to day. It welcomes and assimilates all that is good. Hence Marxism also can find a place in its fold. So there is no permanent conflict between the two ideologies—Marxism and Sarvodaya.

I hope that Marxism will accept a different attitude and adapt itself to the peculiar conditions of Indian culture and tradition. When I was in Orissa some Communist friends came to obtain my signature to the

Appeal for Peace Movement. I told them that every dana-patra (gift-deed) for Bhoodan is a vote for world peace and a mere signature on the appeal would be of no effect at all. After a lapse of one and a half years, one of those friends—perhaps he might have realised the real significance of my words—came to Tamilnad and walked with me in the Bhoodan movement.

Marxism will be of use to India only if it adapts itself to the conditions of this country. It can thrive only if it works keeping the welfare of the people in view. If Marxism is an ideal that refuses to change the doctrine would be of no human value. I hope and believe that it would never be a fetish of the ignorant but will be that of the wise who would be always alert to changing conditions and times.

As the Ganges becomes wider and wider and moves on and finally merges in the ocean, I hope Marxism will merge into Sarvodaya one day. Perhaps the Communist friends may disagree and believe the other way. I may tell them that I have as much right to believe in my own way as they in their own.

The philosophic basis of Sarvodaya is consistent with and congenial to the cultural tradition and condition of the people in India. Very few adjustments are alone required. On the other hand Marxism demands very great adjustments and that is why I say that Marxism will be absorbed in Sarvodaya. The future will prove the truth of this. The Communist friends welcome me. I love them. The Communist Cabinet here in charge of the Government has proclaimed that it will carry on

the administration within the framework of the constitution. This itself is a clear proof of the changing attitude of the believers in Marxism to new conditions.

Question 2: In the light of your past experience and the results in the Bhoodan movement have you ever felt the need for changes in the movement?

Vinobaji: Bhoodan movement has progressed in the right direction. Today it has reached a stage proclaiming that all land should belong to society only. It began with the demand of small bits of land. Then the claim was raised to 1/6th share of the landholders to make every tiller the owner of land. This again developed into the demand of the whole village which is now a Gramdan movement. Now the emphasis is that the bond of love that exists between members of families should extend to all in village community which is the common family holding the land for the benefit of all. The movement as it progresses has naturally blossomed into a flower. In reality it is not a change that has taken place to suit the external conditions. It is an internal process in organic growth for the advancement of all.

Question 3: Do you think that in the light of special conditions in Kerala any change in Bhoodan programme is required?

Vinobaji: I am just studying the conditions in Kerala and I can reply only after my study is complete.

Question 4: A political party which is against the Bhoodan movement is now in power and is engaged in

the task of enacting land legislation according to its ideals. How will it affect the Bhoodan movement?

Vinobaji: I have no party bias. I am a non-party man. I always try to understand man as man. Each one differs from the other. I ignore religious differences and attach no value to party differences. I never believe that man will never change his views and ideas. I do not think or believe that the Communists are against Bhoodan. Those who have no faith in it today, I believe, may change tomorrow and I feel that none can escape it. Perhaps the Communist friends think that the land problem cannot be fully solved through Bhoodan alone.

It has to be seen whether the legislative measures that the Communists are going to bring in are for or against Bhoodan. My view is dependent on the nature of their land legislation. Legislation may be of violent or non-violent nature and it may tilt towards either. If a legislative measure even if it has the backing of the electorate, is not of a non-violent nature, legislation itself will be violence.

(*Sarvodaya—May, '57*)

VIII

Constitutional Communism

KERALA has now attracted the entire world's attention. From my personal contact with her people during the last three months' Bhoodan tour in Kerala, I can say that her people are good-hearted and intelligent. They have a wide international outlook and are quick to grasp the changing events of the world and her problems. Kerala people were in contact with the people of other nations of the world even during the days of the Roman Empire.

The all important problem of the day is 'World Peace'. Nations that believed in violence and armaments for 'peace' have now begun to think of the way of escape from blood and destruction. This is a great thing.

The door for the way of further advance is now open. Kerala should strive to guide and lead. She has now evolved *Constitutional Communism*—a wonder not only to India, but to the whole world. Communist representatives chosen by the free will of her people in mass election are now running the administration of the Kerala State. Such an event is unknown in the history of Communism in the world. Such a change over in other Communist countries could be effected only through violence and bloodshed.

History shows that India has been absorbing every new ideal coming to her shores from outside countries and developing it in her own way. With her spiritual

background she indianises every *ism* in her own cultural way. Socialism of the West did undergo a change here in India. Indian Socialism is based on the creed of Gandhiji's non-violence.

It is but natural that good men's hearts are moved at the sight of suffering. Violence creeps in when they feel impatient and try to bring relief in all hurry. While I was in Hyderabad, the Communist friends also chanted 'Ramdhun' along with other people. When I asked them if they have faith in chanting 'Ramdhun' they said that it was not their faith in 'Ram', but their faith in the people that made them chant along with them.

Communists in India, I hope, will begin to have faith in mental transformation. It is unavoidable. Or else how could Communists in Kerala take a liking for constitutional methods? Constitution is only a man-made one, it is not a *Bhrama Vidya*. It can be changed as the time demands. To give a spiritual essence to every new ideal and its method of realization is inherent in the nature of India and her culture. I hope this Constitutional Communism will evolve into a "non-violent Communism." I wish the land problem in Kerala will be solved in the non-violent way. (From a speech at Koduvalli, North Malabar, Kerala)

(*Sarvodaya*—August, 1957)

I claim to be a foremost Communist

MAHATMA GANDHI

THE REAL DIFFERENCE

Question : “What is the real difference between your technique and that of the communists or the socialists for realizing the goal of economic equality?”

Gandhi : The socialists and communists say they can do nothing to bring about the economic equality today. They will just carry on propaganda in its favour and to that end they believe in generating and accentuating hatred. They say, when they get control over the state, they will enforce equality. Under my plan, the state will be there to carry out the will of the people, not to dictate to them or to force them to do its will. I shall bring about economic equality through non-violence, by converting the people to my point of view, by harnessing the forces of love as against hatred. I will not wait till I have converted the whole society to my view, but, will straight away make a beginning with myself. It goes without saying that I cannot hope to bring about the economic equality of my conception, if I am the owner of fifty motor-cars or even of ten bighas of land. For that, I have to reduce myself to the level of the poorest of the poor. That is what I have been trying to do for the last fifty years or more, and so I claim to be a foremost communist, although I make use of cars and other facilities offered to me by the rich. They have no hold on me and I can shed them at a moment's notice, if the interests of the masses demand it.”

PLACE OF SATYAGRAHA ON LAND PROBLEM

Question : "What is the place of satyagraha in making the rich realize their duty towards the poor?"

Gandhi : "The same as against the foreign power. Satyagraha is a law of universal application. Beginning with the family, its use can be extended to every other circle. Supposing, a land-owner exploits his tenants and mulcts them of the fruit of their toil by appropriating it to his own use. When they expostulate with him, he does not listen and raises objections that he requires so much for his wife, so much for his children and so on. The tenants or those who have espoused their cause and have influence will make an appeal to his wife to expostulate with her husband. She would probably say that for herself she does not need his exploited money. The children will say likewise that they would earn for themselves what they need.

"Supposing further, that he listens to nobody, or that his wife and his children combine against the tenants, they will not submit. They will quit if asked to do so, but they will make it clear that the land belongs to him who tills it. The owner cannot till all the land himself and he will have to give in to their just demands. It, however, may be that the tenants are replaced by others. Agitation short of violence will then continue, till the replacing tenants see their error and make common cause with the evicted tenants. The satyagraha is a process of educating public opinion, such that it covers all the elements of society and in the end makes itself irresistible. Violence interrupts the process and prolongs the real revolution of the whole social structure."

Bharathi's Non-Violent Village Communism

Vinobaji's 'Gramdan' seems to have been anticipated by the great Tamil Poet Subramania Bharathi in his essay Wealth (செல்வம்) written probably at the time of the Russian Revolution. This article written by an admirer of Bharathi and devoted to Bhoodan, shows the clear vision Bharathi had of a Non-violent Village Communism through voluntary effort of the 'haves' inspired by love and justice.

THE history of human civilisation is the history of human endeavour to bring about fellowship among human beings. From time immemorial, man has been constantly thinking of an equitable way of dividing the essentials of human life among the members of the community. Where there is no equitable distribution of these necessities of life, trouble shows its head, revolution shoots up and even war ensues.

Like the many thinkers before him, the great poet Subramania Bharati, whose songs are a byword in Tamil homes today, also gave thought to this question.

A contemporary of the Russian Revolution, Bharati easily foresaw the meaning of the revolt. "The age of the fourth caste—the workers—has come," he said in one of his essays. His Tamil poem hailing the fall of the Czar is wellknown for its condemnation of tyranny and appreciation of democratic power. But Bharati lived long enough to be disappointed with the turn of events in Russia, and he plainly enough condemned the "Path of murder" followed by Lenin and his colleagues. Says he :

“‘What shall we do? We have to use murder to end murderers; we have to use injustice to end injustice’ says Mr. Lenin. This is absolutely wrong in principle. Murder will only sow the seed for more murder; it cannot end it. Injustice will only sow the seed for greater injustice; it cannot end it. The only way evil can be conquered is through good. Only the foolish think that evil can be won by evil. *Adharma* should be overcome only by *dharma*. Murder and pillage can be overcome only by love and generosity. This is the only cure that will give lasting benefit.” ‡

Forswearing violence, Bharati saw only one way of solving the eternal problem of food, clothing and shelter.

He describes his panacea in general terms in an English essay of his, titled “The Coming Age” † thus:

“What the Westerners call Socialism is not clearly understood here. But still for the West as well as for the East, there is only one decent way of living, *viz.*, to make the land a common property and live on it as fellow-workers and co-partners. We have a tradition that in the *Krita Yuga* men lived like that in this country. That may or may not be true. But human will shall yet succeed in bringing about that *Krita Yuga* in all countries and in not a far-off future. The higher Will of man has been baulked till now because for some reason or other it could not direct the main part of its energy towards rectifying the root of our social ills. Justice must be made to triumph in the very formation of human

‡ Essay ‘Wealth,’ in Collected Essays (Tamil), pt. 4, ‘Society.’
 † In his English work “Essays and Prose Fragments.”

society. And then she will naturally triumph in all human affairs and relations.

‘So long as the principle of competition holds sway over the structure of human associations, so long as land and water do not belong commonly to all human beings, men are bound to behave worse than brutes in their ‘economic’ relations at any rate.’

Bharati in his article “Wealth,” suggests that the rich of the village should convene a meeting before the village temple and by public declaration place their land at the disposal of the whole community ! The scene he describes reads almost like a news item from today’s papers describing a meeting in a village in Vinobaji’s Bhoodan Yatra.

Let us listen to his suggestion :

“The world consists of countries; the countries consist of provinces; provinces consist of districts; districts consist of some cities and a large number of villages. Therefore, if we take a village and discover the cure for ridding it of poverty, then that cure could be adopted for ending poverty in the whole world. This is self-evident. Let us, for example, take this village of Kadayam * where I now live. The fields around here belong to 30 big landlords and several small landholders.

“These landowners should all join together and establish an organisation. This organisation should meet before the local temple, and by beat of tom tom gather all the people of the village. Then, with the consent of all the other land-owners, and representing them, one of them should rise up and make this following Promise :

* In Tirunelveli Dt. Madras.

“ ‘ Although you people get only gruel for food, you are not in a position to be sure of a regular supply of even that. Hence you are beset by endless worries, quarrels, envies, deceits, disappointments and riots which mow you down. This worry over food has become your major worry for which you see no end.

“ ‘ The lands in this village have become the sole property of a few of us, either through proper labour or – as Prudhome said ‘ Possession is theft ’ – through improper means. It is not our mistake that land belongs to us. But, it is a fact that without your co-operation, help and friendship, these lands will be of no profit to us.

“ ‘ Further, the troubles you undergo and the resultant struggles you endure in your fight for a regular supply of food, also affects us and makes us miserable. Though we are different in the matter of possession of wealth, otherwise we are exactly like you in all things. And it is very essential for us to mingle with you and have dealings with you. Therefore, if you are ground by misery and poverty, we find it impossible to be happy. All our affairs have to be carried out with your help. We have no other alternative but to depend on you. The flame of your poverty burns us on all sides, like a curse, and makes us disunited. Only envy is growing among us, the rich.

“ ‘ We understand that land is like the mother, common to all, and that it is unjust for us to claim exclusive rights over it. Also, that it is not right, as it happens in countries like Russia, for you to violently do away with us by murder or imprisonment so that you can expropriate our property which has been handed us

from generation to generation. For, possession helps to foster civilisation, and to rob one of possessions is wrong whatever be the reason for doing it.

“If you who are landless can by force rob us and take the land from us, will it not be right for those without clothes to rob you of your clothes? Similarly, the houseless can rob those who possess houses and take them over. The man without possession is such a rarity, that such a man is not found even among the wandering hill tribes.

“And, is land alone property? Houses, vessels, articles of use, the mat, the pillows—everything is property. Would you consider it right if hill tribesmen enter your village and by force rob you of your houses, and all things in them?

“Therefore, it is clear that it is not right for you to expropriate our lands by force. However, we do not want to continue to commit the sin of appropriating and sharing between ourselves the produce of land which mother Earth provides for the use of all. We do not want to continue to say, “You can have food only at our mercy. If we do not like you, you will have to face starvation,” and keep you in a state of bondage. As the sage Tiruvalluvar has described it, you lead a pitiable life asking yourself ever and again the question.

“Is indigence to bear my company even do-day? She tormented me but only yesterday even unto death” *

“We do not want any longer to continue the sin of keeping you in this tantalising state resulting from the

* English translation from V. V. S. Aiyar's *Maxims of Tiruvalluvar*.

problem of food. We have now decided to free you from the fear of hunger, and propose to adopt the following method to achieve the objective.

“Let some of use and some of you join together to form an organisation called Work Planning Association. This Association will decide the amount of work to be done in the village in such matters as agriculture, sanitation, education, temple affairs (religious welfare), food, clothing, utensils, and other industries. This Association will also allocate work to each person according to his competence, and the people of the village will accordingly contribute their labour. Every man, woman and child will be assured of a square meal.

“We and our descendents shall abide by this agreement, generation to generation. We promise to this effect here in this temple, in the presence of God, on our honour and for the welfare of our own children. This agreement between us shall be cut on copper plate, signed by a leading representative of ours, and kept in the temple archives.’

“If such a vow is taken and village work carried on on the basis of the vow, poverty will be ended in the village. More than that, the greater evil of the fear of poverty will vanish. Unity and mutual goodwill will prosper; disease and untimely deaths will decrease; the village will radiate with happiness. If this plan succeeds in one village, it will be followed with benefit by others all over the world.

“My brethren of Tamil Nad, let it be to your credit to lead the way to the eradication of poverty in the world”

“*Sarvodaya*” August '54

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