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THE "GOONDAS" OF KARNATAK

Memo to Congress Working
Committee from Karnatak
Communist Party Provincial
Committee

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To
The President and Members of the
Congress Working Committee.

ON THE QUESTION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES
IN KARNATAK

Dear Friends,

I am herewith enclosing a memorandum from the Provincial Committee of our Party with some enclosures which speak for themselves.

In Kanara the peasants' condition is unbearable. Four out of every five peasants have been reduced to the level of being tenants on the very farms they once owned as peasant proprietors.

The landlords who have grabbed their lands extort from them rents as high as 50 to 75 per cent of the gross produce and in some cases as high as 90 per cent. The peasants have been long demanding that a fair rent be fixed. The Advisers' regime did not listen to them.

They hoped expectantly that the Congress Ministry will. The landlords have been resisting these demands. In these days of scarcity and want, what the peasants demand is the right to live, to get at least enough for their own food of what they themselves produce. But the landlords are out to squeeze out of the peasants the utmost they can for selling in the blackmarket.

The kisans made representations, sent memoranda, and demanded a tripartite conference of Government, landlords and tenants to fix their rent. When their misery and just demand failed to move the Ministers elected by themselves, they held a conference and decided upon the non-payment of these extortionate rents till the Ministry made the land-

lords respect the Congress pledge to reduce the rents and make life tolerable for the peasants.

The Bombay Ministry instead of welcoming the above as justified popular pressure against the greedy landlords has adopted the opposite course of sanctioning police repression against the starving peasants themselves. Kisan organisers and leaders have been exterped as "goondas" from the very villages where they were born—where they have their homes, hearths and farms. Reserve police has been used to terrorise the peasants into submission.

Not only are the just demands of the peasants not met but their movement is being suppressed, most elementary civil liberties are being denied to them. Similarly if the workers go on strike for a living wage, Section 144 is declared and the right of peaceful picketing denied.

The proud Kanarese people were split up by the British conquerors, a part kept in the Bombay Presidency, the other allowed to remain under the Nizam and the major part being under Mysore. The workers of Kolar gold fields used to hold their meetings in the neighbouring British territory at Budugur whenever the Mysore autocracy banned them from meeting in their own town. The neighbouring Madras Ministry has denied them even this opportunity, a thing which was not done even under the Advisers' regime.

I would earnestly request you to read through the Memorandum and right the wrongs that are being perpetrated by the bureaucrats and the landlords under the Bombay Congress Ministry that refuses to implement its own pledges to the peasants and instead permits police repression against their movement. I request you to instruct the Ministry to meet the following elementary demands:

1. Withdraw all externment orders.
2. Release kisan prisoners.
3. Respect the civil liberties of the people.
4. Reduce peasants' rents and immediately call a tripartite conference, as demanded by them.

Syt. Morarji Desai and other Bombay Ministers have been slandering us long enough, misrepresenting us to the people after ensuring that the press blacks out our answers. The enclosed documents would indicate how grave is the

situation and our representative would be too willing to meet any representative of the Working Committee and prove all that is written here. But we do not think you will find it necessary. The facts given are shocking enough, and the cause, our common cause of the common people and their welfare, and the enemies too are our common enemies — the British-created parasitical landlords, their bureaucracy and police.

Yours truly,
(Sd.) P. C. Joshi,
General Secretary

**MEMORANDUM
TO THE
CONGRESS WORKING COMMITTEE
FROM
KARNATAK PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE
OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA**

INTRODUCTION

Heavy bureaucratic repression is let loose on the public workers and the young peasant movement in North Kanara district of the Bombay Presidency.

The enclosed Memo submitted by the Kisan Sabha to Syt. Morarji Desai, Home and Revenue Minister in the Bombay Congress Ministry, gives the facts showing the gross exploitation of the tenants, the exorbitant rents (often as high as 90 per cent of the gross produce) that the landlords extort from the peasants and the unanimous long standing demand of the tenant farmers (who constitute more than 80 per cent of the cultivating population) for fixation of fair rent.

The bureaucracy, in order to assist the landlords and beat down the legitimate demands of the peasants has launched several repressive measures against the active elements in the Kisan Sabha.

EXTERMENT AS "GOONDAS"

The latest of these measures is the gross misuse of the "Goonda" Act. Under this Act, political workers with a good record of patriotic work and peasant leaders who have put in a life-time of honest toil are externed as "goondas" from the Kanara district. They are:

1. **N. G. Malsekar**—Organising Secretary of the Dis-

trict Kisan Sabha. He was one of those patriotic Kulkarnis who resigned his Government job in the days of the Civil Disobedience Movement. He was working as a carpenter on building projects till he became full-time organiser of the Kisan Sabha. He has been externed from the district.

2. **D. V. Singh**—Secretary of the District Kisan Sabha. He was an industrial worker till he came back to his native Kanara and began work among the peasantry about a year back. He has been externed from the province.

3. **P. J. Naik**—President of the Karwar Taluk Kisan Sabha. He is a peasant who owns about 12 acres of land and took leading part in the kisan movement. He is externed from the district.

4. **Syed Hyder Syed Yusuf**—Vice-President of the Karwar Taluk Kisan Sabha. He is an old tenant farmer, aged 70 years, and took active part in the Non-Cooperation Movement. He is a leader of the peasants in his area and is also the President of the Taluk Muslim League. He has been externed from the district.

5. **N. L. Upadhyaya**—Secretary of the Karnatak Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of India. A young political worker, who has dedicated himself to public service and was a member of the Executive of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. He has also been served with a notice of externment under the Goonda Act.

Their only crime was that they were organising the peasants, to put forward their just demands, making representations to the Minister to set up a tripartite commission to fix fair rents.

The annexed order of externment will show that they are being externed merely on the false charges made by landlords and the corrupt local officials. Not a single charge is specified, nor a single witness called to prove any of the charges.

In fact, there has not been a single case of any violence or clash due to the activities of the Kisan Sabha.

FALSE CONVICTIONS

The police, however, cook up false cases against the peasants. Most of the Mamlatdars and local Judiciary are

themselves landlords and so it is not difficult to jail the peasants on such false, cooked-up charges.

Three kisan workers of Karwar Taluk thus charged with "dacoity" and have been jailed for one year.

The case from Murdeswar illustrates all that is said above.

Here nine Kisan Sabha peasants are charged with unlawful assembly and rioting. The facts are that at the end of March 1946, a peaceful procession of the kisans was attacked by an agent of the landlord. It was a deliberate provocation. Instead of charging the hireling the police arrested the kisans. When the trial was going on before the Magistrate, a leading landlord of the area was given a chair beside the Magistrate and his influence in the judgment is suspected. This fact was brought to the notice of Syt. S. P. Gaonkar, a Congress M.L.A. from Kanara and a Parliamentary Secretary, and he promised to see that the cases are withdrawn.

POLICE RAIDS AND HARASSMENT

On 18th January 1947, nearly 100 policemen with 5 Sub-Inspectors and a Mamlatdar went to Ulga village on the plea that they were executing a decree against P. J. Naik, the President of the Kisan Sabha. Despite the fact that Naik had already paid the landlord the rent and secured a receipt, they arrested him, entered the house of his brother and beat to unconsciousness his old mother who protested against this invasion. Another woman of the family was chased by the police till she fell into a disused well and was hurt severely. Several other members of the family were beaten including women. This was nothing but an attempt to terrorise the entire Naik family for his Kisan Sabha activities.

At Hubli, in Dharwar District, our Party worker Prasad was arrested on 12th January while selling the booklet **Blood Bath at Amalner**, though there had been no ban on the book.

At Bijapur, orders were issued under Section 144, prohibiting even peaceful picketing within 25 feet of the shops. This was an uncalled for interference with the democratic right of peaceful picketing.

At Belgaum, the Special Branch Police harassed Dharwadkar, a local Communist worker, for several days on the absurd plea that he was responsible for circulating bulletins inciting communal riots! When everyone knows that Communists, wherever they may be, are the best fighters against riots and for Hindu-Muslim unity.

Lastly, we give another case of gross intervention against the democratic rights of the workers. The miners of Kolar gold fields in Mysore State are mostly prohibited by the Mysore State Government from holding meetings in the mining area. They therefore used to meet at considerable inconvenience to themselves at a place called Budugur in Chittoor District of British India, a part of the Madras Presidency. Until now this right was not interfered with. But this year the bureaucracy went to the help of the British mining company and prohibited the meetings. The exploited miners whose fight against the British mining company ought to be supported by the Congress, have thus been deprived of a most elementary right, when a Congress Ministry is in power in Madras.

LANDLORD EXPLOITATION AND PEASANT DEMANDS

This heavy repression is clearly the offensive of the landlords and the local bureaucracy against the democratic movement of the peasants.

North Kanara is mostly forest land. The small percentage of land under cultivation falls into four types: the **khari** (salty) land near the sea-coast, the **jungli** (forest) land, the **tari** (wet and fertile) land and the **makki** (dry) land. Except on the **tari**, which is a very small percentage, cultivation on the other types of land means heavy expenditure.

Most of the land is concentrated in the hands of non-cultivating proprietors who constitute only 3 per cent of the total population. Through moneylending and foreclosure of mortgages, the original peasant owners were reduced to tenant farmers. Today four out of every five cultivators are tenants who do not own any land.

The greater part of the land is under the fixed rent

system by which the landlord takes away his rent, irrespective of the actual produce realised by the peasants. These rents vary from 55 to 75 per cent of the gross produce, and are often as high as 90 per cent.

From the balance of the produce left, after the landlord takes away his rent, the peasant has to bear the entire costs of cultivation. A typical case is that of Syed Hyder Syed Yusuf himself. He farms 10 acres of land, which produces about 130 khandis of paddy, out of which 90 go away as rent to the absentee landlord. The costs of cultivation come roughly to Rs. 700 or 800 a year, whereas the paddy that is left to him does not fetch more than Rs. 400 or 500. The landlord has no obligation on him to meet any part of the costs of cultivation and only pays the land revenue which is not more than Rs. 50 for the 10 acres.

Thus the producing peasant got into debts. If he worked harder and increased the yield, the landlord increased the rents on the ground that new tenants were prepared to give higher rents. The tenant farmer had to enter into a new agreement to give higher rent or had to quit. Thus the harder the peasant worked, the deeper he got into debts.

For several years the tenant farmers have been demanding that these extortionate rents be stopped. They want fair rents to be fixed and this brutal exploitation to go.

REPRESENTATIONS TO THE MINISTRY

As far back as 3 years ago, the Kisan Sabha had demanded that a tripartite commission consisting of representatives of the Kisan Sabha, landlords and Government be appointed to inquire into the rent levels in each area and fix the fair rent. Nothing was done by the then Section 93 regime.

After the Congress Ministry came into office, the kisans felt hopeful that now at last their grievances would be redressed. Under the Tenancy Act (1939) passed by the Congress Ministry (when last in office) the Mamlatdar was directed to hold an inquiry and fix the "fair" rent, on application from the tenant. In June-July 1946, several hundred applications were filed by the kisans at the Mamlat-

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dars office. They hoped that under the Congress Ministry, the Mamlatdar would have to give justice to them. But the Mamlatdars did nothing.

Several representations were made to the Congress Ministry demanding a proper inquiry into "rent" but no answer was vouchsafed.

In November-December 1946 two Ministers, Syts. L. M. Patil and Tapase, visited Karwar. They were each welcomed by the kisans and the demands were placed before them. The Ministers told them that the amount of rent was fixed by "free" agreement between landlord and tenant, and so it was not easy to interfere! When the kisans insisted that they had either to sign such agreements or get thrown out of the land and that such agreements were neither free nor fair, the Ministers said they would do something about it—but nothing was done.

At last, at the Karwar Taluk Kisan Sabha Conference held on 21st January 1947, attended by 10,000 kisans of whom 2,000 were women, resolutions were passed demanding a tripartite commission immediately to fix "fair" rents, asking the Congress Ministry to stop the evictions of peasants for arrears of rent and calling upon the peasants to withhold payment of rent to the landlord till such fair rent was fixed.

The decision to withhold payment of rent was taken openly at this Conference, only after several representations had been made to the Ministry but all of them were ignored. The resolutions were forwarded immediately to Minister Morarji Desai, together with a Memorandum.

Nothing was done to meet the legitimate demands of the peasants. Only the bureaucracy used the Goonda Act against the Kisan Sabha leaders. The externed peasant leaders, Naik and Syed Hyder, met Minister Morarji Desai and urged that the externment orders were unjustified and that they should be withdrawn. Nothing has yet been done by the Congress Ministry.

CONCLUSION

All these facts will show that it is a clear case where the Working Committee, in the name of elementary civil fiber-

ties and regardless of all political differences, must intervene against this gross repression of the popular movement under a Congress Ministry, which is refusing to act to help the exploited peasants who have for long been demanding bare justice.

From
The General Secretary,
North Kanara District Kisan Sabha,
KARWAR.

To
The Hon'ble Mr. Morarji Desai,
Home and Revenue Minister,
Government of Bombay,
BOMBAY.

MEMORANDUM RE. DECREE ORDERS PASSED
BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR RENT IN ARREARS
AND FIXATION OF PRESENT RENT

Sir,

It has been an accepted fact by the Government that the rents payable to landlords by the tenants in this district are very high—as high as 90 per cent of the gross produce of the land. This fact was substantiated by your speech in the Legislative Assembly in its last session when the Amendment to the Tenancy Act (1939) was under consideration.

The position in the four talukas of Karwar—Ankola, Kumta, Honnavar and Bhatkal Peth—is all the more serious as production in these talukas is very low and extremely uncertain. It should be remembered that land in this area lies on the outskirts of salt water coast and jungle. Due to uncertainty of rains—sometimes heavy and sometimes very low—good production is usually obtained once in three years. When the rains are less than normal, the land situated near the jungle gets dried up and would not yield good crops. On the other hand, if the rainfall is heavy, crops in the lands situated along the coast-line are damaged. Thus the tenants have to undergo huge expenses of cultivation in spite of terrible uncertainty of crops.

In addition to all these factors, the landlord demands

heavy rent, never caring to know whether the land yields any crop or no. Thus for the last twelve years and more, the tenant has been forced to keep some rent in arrears as a result of which nearly 3 years' full rent has accumulated. The landlords, now taking advantage of the Tenancy Act, are harassing the tenants, threatening them with eviction and getting the property of the tenants attested in execution of the decrees. Thus the court have passed no less than 4,000 decrees against the tenants, while nearly 150 eviction cases are pending. Further still, the courts are also passing decrees against those tenants who have paid arrears of rent, but who were unable to secure rent-receipts from the expecting landlords, as there was no legal obligation either on the landlord to give receipts or for the tenants to obtain them. Nor there was any practice in vogue to this effect before the application of the Tenancy Act. In addition to all these, the courts are also passing decrees against those tenants who have failed to pay vartav—an extra levy not recognised by law, a levy charged by the landlords according to their own measure.

The Karwar District Kisan Sabha had sent a Memorandum to the Government last year without any effect.

The Kisan Sabha had also sent to you, in January 1947, a copy of the resolution passed by the Karwar Taluka Kisan Sabha. The Kisan Sabha representatives had also seen the Hon. Minister for Agriculture in November 1946, and he directed us to approach you.

As per Tenancy Act, Chapter I, Clause 2, Sub-clause 3, the "agricultural income", means the portion of the produce which is left after deducting all expenses of the tenant for cultivating the land. If this is so, the present rent, namely 1/3 of the gross produce, is too high.

Therefore, on behalf of the Karwar District Kisan Sabha, I submit as follows:

1) That an inquiry committee consisting of representatives of Kisan Sabha, landlords and the Government should be appointed to ascertain the exact rent to be paid as per the Tenancy Act.

2) All arrears of rent should be cancelled, or, in the alternative, the execution of decrees for arrears should be immediately stopped pending the above inquiry.

3) All the cases of eviction should be immediately withdrawn.

Yours truly,
(Sd.) D. V. Singh

January 1947

P.N. Herewith enclosed a copy of resolutions passed in our Karwar Taluk Kisan Sabha Conference on January 21, 1947, which was attended by over 10,000 kisans including 2,000 women.

Resolutions

1. This Conference of the kisans of Karwar is of opinion that the Tenancy Act enacted by the Congress Ministry is unsatisfactory and falls far short of the expectations of the kisans.

It notes that agricultural income means that portion of the produce which is left after deducting all the expenses of the tenants for cultivation. (Ref. Tenancy Act, Chapter 1, Clause 2, Sub-clause 8). The Kisan Conference reiterates its earlier decision that rent should be only from that portion of the produce which is left after deducting all the expenses of the tenants.

This Conference urges the Government to set up a committee consisting of the representatives of the Kisan Sabha and the landlords to settle the rent to be paid, taking into consideration the situation in each village.

Pending this settlement, the Conference appeals to all the kisans to withhold payment of rent to the landlords and fight for their just demand.

2. This Conference condemns the various decree orders passed by the Government against kisans for arrears of rent. The Conference is of opinion that unpaid rent for previous years should be on the basis of the rent for this year. It urges the Government authorities not to take any hasty steps in the matter.

3. This Conference condemns the action of those landlords who have taken more than 1/3 of the produce as rent this year by misleading the kisans. It appeals to the kisans not to fall a prey to this false propaganda of the landlords and their agents. It requests the Government to take necessary steps to restore the excess rent taken away illegally by the landlords.

4. This Conference strongly condemns the action of the Government in forcibly searching the house of Purushottam Naik, taking away various things from his house, brutally beating his old mother and others. It particularly resents the action of the Mamlatdar and the other officers who resorted to this uncalled-for repressive action. The Conference urges the Government to set free Purushottam Naik, return the things taken from his house and enquire into the whole matter.