

AGRICULTURAL LABOUR

Agricultural workers constitute the single biggest section of our country's population - 12 crores out of 44 crores according to the 1961 census - 25 per cent of the total population, or one-third of the rural population. They are the most exploited, socially oppressed section of our people in many respects, treated worse than the Negroes in America or the Blacks in South Africa.

The agricultural policy of the Government, the system of distributing credit as well as high yielding seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, has only helped the intensification and the polarisation between haves and have-nots in the rural system. Whatever be the talk of the government in relation to land reforms, the hundreds of crores of loans from I.D.A. (the affiliate of World Bank) to various state governments for distribution of tractors, combines, oil engines, electric motors, and other necessities of the rural rich, will in action only mean greater concentration of land and result in growth of agricultural labour in the rural areas.

These economic facilities do not reach the small farmers and "many of the small farmers belonging to the Harijan community are not aware of the facilities by the extension agency. Loans given under the intensive manufacturing scheme of the samithi rarely reach the small cultivators who suffer from social disabilities."

("Agricultural Development and Small Farmers : A Study of Andhra Pradesh", Gogula Parthasarathy : Andhra University 1971, Page 68).

Where the new techniques have taken root, land prices have risen three, four or even five times and land-owners, especially the big ones, are in no mood to share with others the benefits brought by better farming methods. Their attempt is to get rid of tenants altogether and resume land for so-called self-cultivation, making use of the virtually unlimited supply of hired labour. Tenants are in this way being reduced to the position of landless labourers.

The increase in numbers of the rural labourers, which is mainly agricultural labour, is a growing phenomenon in India today.

Growing Rural Labour

According to the Second Labour Enquiry, of the estimated 66.6 million rural households in 1956-57, 24.5 per cent or 16.3 million were agricultural labour households. In 1963-64, according to the National Sample Survey (19th Round), there were about 67.6 million rural households in India, of which 17.2 million, or about 26 per cent were rural labour households.

We had noted in the chapter *"Is India on the Way to Industrialisation?"* that there has been no fundamental change in the occupational pattern in the country between industry and agriculture. The same is true in the rural economy.

Between 1901, and 1969, the proportion of agricultural workers to the total work force fluctuated around 70 per cent of the total population; though the proportion of agricultural workers to the total work force remained stationary at about 70 per cent, in absolute terms there was an increase from 97.2 million to 132 million.

The following table shows the percentages of rural labour households in rural houses in various states of India. In the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal, **more than one third of their respective rural households** constituted rural labour households. Rural labour is predominantly agricultural labour, constituting 82 per cent of the rural labour.

TABLE : 14.1

Rural Labour Households to Total Rural Households in States, 1963-64

State	Per cent	State	Per cent
Kerala	36.7	Tamil Nadu	36.3
Andhra Pradesh	34.7	West Bengal	33.8
Bihar	32.9	Maharashtra	30.0
Orissa	30.0	Mysore	23.6
Madhya Pradesh	22.9	Gujarat	19.8
Assam	15.0	Uttara Pradesh	15.2

(includes Manipoor & Tripura also)		Punjab (includes Delhi & Himachal Pradesh)	14.9
Rajasthan	11.8	Jammu & Kashmir	2.5
		All India	25.5

The latest available figures show that, out of a total of rural population of 434 million, over 100 million owned no land at all and another 185 million owned less than five acres per family. Most of those who owned less than five acres of small patches of land are also mainly agricultural labour. The following table shows the percentage of agricultural labour households to the total rural households in 1963-64, state-wise.

TABLE : 14.2

Agricultural Labour Households to Rural Households

(per cent)

States	1963-64
Andhra Pradesh	29.1
Assam	11.7
Bihar	26.3
Gujarat	15.8
Jammu & Kashmir	1.0
Kerala	27.2
Madhya Pradesh	19.5
Maharashtra	26.6
Orissa	26.5
Mysore	19.5
Punjab including Himachal Pradesh	12.2
Rajasthan	4.5

Tamil Nadu	30.9
Uttar Pradesh	12.4
West Bengal	27.4
All India	20.9

The percentage of agricultural labour households to total rural households is above the all-India average in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Landless Labour

Labour without land is a growing phenomenon today. The growing capitalist relations and commodity production ruins small production, reducing petty cultivators and tenants into landless agricultural labour creating a rural proletariat without the means of production. He is left with his own labour power and nothing else to sell in the market for his living.

As Lenin had said in his book "Development of Capitalism in Russia":

"Machines lead to the concentration of production and to the practice of capitalist co-operation in agriculture", and "where the employment of machines is particularly wide-spread (Novorossia) is also distinguished by the quite considerable size of its farms". The systematic employment of machinery in agriculture ousts the patriarchal 'middle' peasant as irrevocably as the steam power loom ousts the handicraft weaver".

Thus the growth of commodity production in agriculture, growing capitalist relations in the countryside, concentration of production, and the increasing employment of machinery, ousts small and middle peasants from the land increasing the numbers of landless labourers.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the policies being adopted by the ruling big bourgeois - landlord class in India is also increasing the army of the rural proletariat. This is clear from various studies on the impact of the 'new agricultural strategy' in

India.

The following table gives the percentage of distribution of agricultural labour households, by category of households with land and without land, in 1956-57 and 1963-64, showing the increasing trend towards the growth of the rural proletariat without land.

TABLE : 14.3

Percentage Distribution of Agricultural Labour Households by Category of Households : 1956-57 and 1963-64

	With Land		Without Land	
	1956-57	1963-64	1956-57	1963-64
Andhra Pradesh	33.0	27.3	67.0	72.7
Assam	29.7	40.3	70.3	59.7
Bihar	61.2	47.3	38.8	52.7
Gujarat	27.1	13.7	72.9	86.3
Jammu & Kashmir	32.8	50.0	67.2	50.0
Kerala	56.1	69.9	43.9	30.1
Madhya Pradesh	38.9	50.0	61.0	50.0
Maharashtra	27.1	28.6	72.9	71.4
Mysore	34.5	31.0	65.5	69.0
Orissa	53.0	44.8	47.0	55.2
Punjab	11.0	14.5	89.0	85.5
Rajasthan	35.8	39.6	64.2	60.4
Tamil Nadu	34.5	29.0	65.5	71.0
Uttar Pradesh	54.3	51.5	45.7	48.5
West Bengal	33.4	37.8	66.6	62.2
All India	41.6	38.8	58.4	61.2

The all-India average of agricultural labour households

without land out of the total agricultural labour households has increased from 58.4 per cent to 61.2 per cent during 1956-57 and 1963-64. The states in which such an increase of households of landless agricultural labourers could be reckoned are Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Mysore, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh. The states where the percentage of landless agricultural labour households to agricultural labour households is greater than the all-India percentage of 61.2, are Andhra Pradesh (72.7), Gujarat (86.3), Maharashtra (71.4), Mysore (69.0), Punjab (85.5), Tamil Nadu (71.0), and West Bengal (62.2).

As for the percentage distribution of agricultural labour households, by categories, about 33 per cent of the households had some land in 1963-64 as against about 42 per cent in 1956-57. According to Agricultural Labour Enquiries, the percentage of landless labour to total agricultural labour which was 50 in 1950-51 increased to about 57 in 1956-57, and according to National Sample Survey, the percentage was about 61 in 1963-64.

"The percentage of landless agricultural labour has, thus, been increasing during all the years of developmental planning."

The impact of the 'green revolution' after 1963-64 in areas where intensive cultivation has progressed has not been studied yet in its sum total. Certain studies made so far have proved that this growth in the numbers of agricultural labour has been significant in areas where the new strategy has been implemented intensively.

Francine Frankel, who undertook a study of socio-economic relations of the peasantry under the impact of the new strategy, came to the conclusion that, "the majority of 80 per cent in the rice belt have experienced a relative decline of their economic position; and some proportion, representing unprotected tenants cultivating under oral lease, have suffered an absolute deterioration in their living standard.

"In fact, in areas where high-yielding varieties of rice have been successfully introduced, this tendency towards economic polarisation between large farmers, on the one hand, and the majority of small owners, owner-cum-tenant cultivators, and share-croppers, on the other, has already begun." (Mainstream,

December 13, 1969).

Agricultural labourers and landless peasants, including landless share-croppers in the villages he studied in Burdwan district, numbered 39 per cent, 52 per cent, 67 per cent, 59 per cent in the four villages for which he was given detailed data. He further notes that "the project officer and IAD" staff support the general interpretation suggested by this data that the overwhelming majority of agriculturalist families in Burdwan district are either completely landless or operate uneconomic holdings of usually less than three acres." (Ibid: Page 20). "in West Godavary district about 60 per cent of agricultural families are actually farm labourers." (Mainstream, December 27, 1969). "The largest portion of agricultural population in Palghat district - about 85 per cent are farm labourers." Writing about Ludhiana, he says that "the inefficient farmers, that is, the small farmers who cannot afford the new technology, will ultimately find the gap in returns to investment on large and small farms so great that they will sell their holdings and leave agriculture. Similarly, the tenant class will begin to disappear."

He concludes his review of the impact of this new strategy saying that this "has already produced large numbers of unemployed young men in the villages who may present serious socio-economic and law and order problems in the years to come". "rapid deterioration in 'good-relations' between land-owners and agricultural labourers", has already led to the first confrontation between landlord and labour factions".

He foresees increasing confrontation of these polarised forces. He declares :

In other parts of the wheat belt, for example, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where the majority of cultivating households operate holdings of less than 10 acres, where inequitable tenurial arrangements are an additional drain on the meagre resources of the small farmers, where the incidence of landless labourers is higher, and where the level of industrial development is low, it is difficult to see more than a small section of agricultural population being able to realise significant benefits from the wheat revolution. Indeed, the gains in these areas are likely to be even more heavily skewed;

the increase in disparities larger; and the rate of displacement greater than can reasonably be expected to be absorbed through the creation of alternative job opportunities outside agriculture [and this would lead to] increasing instances of class confrontation in rural areas. This emerges clearly from a consideration of agricultural modernisation and social change in the predominantly paddy growing districts of West Godavary, Tanjore, Palghat and Burdwan.

The question arises as to who is mainly responsible for the creation of this confrontation in the rural areas? Who is responsible for the increase in land concentration? Who should be held responsible for the growing numbers of agricultural labourers? Or, in other words, who is responsible for the creation of this revolutionary situation?

Is it the revolutionaries or the party in power?

Average Income of Agricultural Labourer

When we discussed the question of per capita income, we had noted that nearly "70 per cent of the rural population in 1967-68 were found to be at poverty level", even according to the diagnosis of the Reserve Bank of India. Agricultural labour is the main chunk of this group of the population living on almost starvation diet in India. Not only are their wages the lowest, but the incidence of unemployment is highest. According to a study in Economic Times, it has been found that the incidence of unemployment is as high as 15 per cent of agricultural labour households as compared to 3 per cent for other rural households (September 25, 1970). Even of the agricultural labourers who are employed, except for the attached labourers, the others do not find employment all the year round. In most of the dry cultivation areas, employment at the highest is not more than 150 days in the year; in the irrigated areas, too, full employment is available only in the sowing and reaping periods - in all the other periods, it is only haphazard and partial employment.

The following table gives the average annual income per agricultural labour household for two different years 1953-54 and

1963-64. The data are for all India, though comparable statewide data are not available.

TABLE : 14.4

Average Annual Income Per Agricultural Labour Household by Source : All India

Source of Income	Annual Income (Rs.)		Percentage to total	
	1956-57	1963-64	1956-57	1963-64
(1) Cultivation of land	32.15	42.54	8.3	6.4
(2) Agricultural wages	281.08	544.55	72.9	82.5
(3) Non agricultural wages	56.96	33.33	14.8	5.1
(4) Other sources	15.19	39.47	4.0	6.0
Total	385.38	659.89	100.0	100.0

Source : Economic Times, August 9, 1970.

The average annual income per agricultural labour house, which was Rs. 385.88 in 1956-57, increased to Rs. 660.19 in 1963-64 - recording an increase of about 71 per cent.

The basic feature to be noted here is the greater dependence of the agricultural labourer on agricultural wages in 1963-64 than in 1956-57. Whereas in 1956-57 the percentage of agricultural wages to his total income was 72.9 per cent, it increased in 1963-64 to 82.5 per cent. There was an absolute fall in income from non-agricultural wages and other occupations from Rs. 56.96 in 1956-57 to Rs. 33.33 in 1963-64. It is evident that even meagre possibilities of other occupations in the rural sector have dried up.

The Economic Times Research Bureau reports on November 18, 1970, that average daily earnings of agricultural labourers declined from 207 paise in 1950-51 to 203 paise in 1956-57 and increased to 297 paise in 1964-65.

For any one living in the villages, these figures as average earnings are fantastically high. However, what with more than three-fourths of the area under dry cultivation, where wages are as low as 50 paise even today in quite a number of remote areas; taking into consideration the large number of unemployed; considering that a large part of the year is without employment; this 'average' is not possible even in most developed areas.

Even so, let us consider these data from a different angle. These figures from the two Agricultural Enquiries of 1950-51 and 1956-57, and the data released by the Central Labour Bureau for 1964-65, show that "although in terms of money the wages of agricultural labour recorded an increase of about 37 per cent in a period of 14 years, real wages actually declined by about 5 per cent during the period". The following table produced by the same Economic Times article clearly underlines the same fact.

TABLE : 14.5

Indices of Money, Real Earnings of Agricultural Labourers

(1950-51 : 100)

Year	Indices of Money Earnings		Indices of Real Earnings	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1950-51	100	100	100	100
1956-57	94	94	94	94
1964-65	137	145	95	100

"Though the state governments have adopted minimum wage regulations, in actual practice the labours get much less than the minimum fixed."

Therefore, the rise in prices has not only eaten up his increments completely, his position has actually become worse. Consequently the wide gulf between the economic conditions of the rural labour and the top class of rural society has further

widened.

We must also remember that wages are paid in various ways. Various forms of feudal relations exist, even in areas where commodity production and capitalist relations have developed. Sometimes the wages are paid in cash and in quite a number of places and quite a number of times - especially in the reaping season - they are paid in kind; sometimes partly in cash and partly in kind. "Capitalism penetrates into agriculture particularly slowly and in extremely varied forms" (Lenin), with the result that various forms of capitalist relations along with feudal exploitation come to make an excessive burden on the rural poor.

The feudal relations in our countryside are prevalent almost every-where. They have preserved almost all their medieval supremacy of the landlords over the peasantry in the villages. In the following pages, a few instances of feudal methods of exploitation will be given as examples of the prevailing and growing tensions in the villages. There is yet prevalent in the overwhelming parts of the country, a system known as 'debt bondage' or 'debt slavery'. A correspondent writing in Economic Times on June 1, 1970, on the state of the Harijans in Mysore describes the system as follows :

There is then the 'Jeetha' system - the pernicious practice of a system of bonded labour - something akin to slavery practiced by the early American settlers. It is said to be practiced in parts of Hassan district and also in south Kanara, north Kanara, Chikmagalur and Shimoga districts. The Elaya Perumal Committee describes the system thus : 'according to the Jeetha system, the agricultural labourers are advanced petty sums of money in time of their need. They are bound in such a way that they are not able to repay the debt out of their meagre wages because under the terms of the bond they got food, cloth, and small salary only. The result is that they are not only unable to repay the loan but also have to add to it. Consequently their debt increases. Even their children are obliged to take upon themselves, the repayment and become involved in it.

Thus the lords of the land have even retained the jurisdiction over their 'labourers'. They have preserved almost all their medieval practices, including various forms of free labour. It is

true feudalism is flourishing more in some localities than in others, but the fact is that nowhere has it been entirely destroyed.

For example, the system of attached labourers is prevalent all over the country. Writing about Burdwan district Francine Frankel reports that "permanent relations between land owners and labour still persist; they are particularly common in parts of the district dominated by larger holdings. In fact, with the introduction of intensive cropping, the necessity of having assured labour at peak cultivation period, actually tended to strengthen the system of permanent land-owner stroke labourer relations." (Mainstream ; December 13, 1969).

This system is based on local traditions and customs. They are "employed according to a traditional arrangement by which agricultural labour families are permanently attached to the family of a land-owner, usually from one generation to the next Those interviewed reported cash payments ranging from Rs. 110 to Rs. 150 annually and varying amounts of paddy, averaging six to seven maunds a year. In addition, they ordinarily receive two or three meals a day and during the year three or four dhoties, one woolen wrapper, oil, bidi, and paddy straw for thatching their houses." (Ibid, Page 22).

Thus the attached labourers are characterised by debt bondage, caste restraints, tie-in allotments of land, indicating prevalence of precapitalist features of employment of labour. Attached labourers are tied down by loans, repayment of which were practically impossible.

Moreover, in many cases the employers give the attached labourers house-sites and land sometimes on a share-cropping basis. In South India large numbers of farm servants known as **padiyala, pannaiyala, pulayas, paleru, jeeta, etc.**, work year after year, if not generation after generation for the same land-owner families.

Such a medieval system of bond slaves, according to the Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry Report, is on the increase. The percentage of attached labourers among all agricultural labourers increased from 9.7 per cent in 1950-51 to 26.63 per cent in 1956-57. **There is no doubt that considerable section of the agricultural labourers in India are victims of pre-capitalist exploitation;** semi-feudal feature of wage payment in kind is

prevalent in vast areas of our countryside. It was revealed by the Second Agriculture Labour Enquiry Report that the employment situation as well as the terms and conditions of employment have markedly worsened over time.

Apart from low wages and inhuman living conditions, the agricultural labourers are victims of unemployment and under-employment. Even according to the note submitted by the Central Statistical Organisation to the All-India Seminar on Agricultural Labour in 1965, they are employed only 200 days a year.

The agricultural labourers are not part and parcel of the village. They are forced to live outside the main village, in separate **chettos**, under horrible conditions, without any common facilities such as wells for drinking water, roads, street lanes, etc. They are mostly illiterate.

When such are the conditions, and they are becoming worse with feudal appropriation and exploitation taking open forms of violence against agricultural labour (many more instances will be given later in this chapter), it is disgusting to note that the Soviet revisionists are showering praise on the Congress government for having implemented 'partial bourgeois agrarian reform'. In an article published in *Izvestia*, September 4, 1970, they write : "The bourgeois agrarian reforms carried out in India for all their inconsistency - they do not solve the agrarian problem in favour of the peasantry and do not eliminate the archaic production relations in the countryside - have, nevertheless, dealt a blow at feudal landlords, the princes and zamindars". In their service to the Indian bourgeoisie, the Soviet revisionists seem to be more loyal than the king himself.

Even the Economic Times, June 1, 1970, calls this system no better than 'age-old serfdom'. As Ranjit Das Gupta has written, "The intertwining of the pre-capitalist methods of exploitation and the capitalist method has subjected the underprivileged groups of rural India to absolute and relative impoverishment".

In addition to this, they are socially oppressed in our caste-ridden society. The overwhelming majority of agricultural labourers belong to untouchable or backward castes. Social ostracism of those castes is worse than the whites attitude to Negroes in America. They are obstructed from using the wells, tanks, temples, and other public places.

The reason for this is that, during the British period, there was no fundamental change in the character of the Indian economy which remained essentially semi-feudal and semi-colonial in character.

Even after the transfer of power from the British to the Indian comprador class, no fundamental changes in the economic, social and administrative spheres has been achieved. Even to this day, the character of the Indian economy has remained essentially semi-feudal and semi-colonial. Forms in some respects have changed, but fundamentally caste has remained the same. The system of Panchayat Raj, the growth of green revolution, the growth of commodity production in the countryside, have only helped the ruling big landlord and the big business class to increase their domination through the revivalist and obscurantist social ideology based on castes.

The primary condition for lifting agricultural workers from this horrible state in which they have been forced to exist is the elimination and extermination of landlordism. Fundamental changes in the agrarian structure and social relations in the rural areas can be achieved only through an agrarian revolution.

Untouchability

The problem of untouchability is inter-related with the problem of rural land relations. The extent and magnitude of the problem of untouchability is the reflection mainly of the economic lot of the scheduled castes, and a reflection of an economic society with feudal social and economic relations which are still strong. The economic relations in the countryside are such that they are entirely dependent on the high caste landlords.

Due to the "increasing power of what is called in India the rural elite", "the caste system is probably stronger today than it was at the time when India became independent. Caste is so deeply entrenched in India's traditions that it cannot be eradicated except by drastic surgery." ("Asian Drama", Page 279)

The problem of untouchability can be solved only by a hundred per cent democratic revolution capable of smashing to smithereens the feudal landlord hold in the rural areas, under the impact of mass uprisings, by total elimination of landlordism.

Tension has been growing between landlords and agricultural labourers in various pockets in our country. Writing in the Economic Times (July 9, 1970) about the tensions in Thanjavur, in relation to the intensive agricultural district programme, the paper's special correspondent noted that "the disturbing aspect is the running feud between the landlord class and the agricultural labour in half a dozen taluks constituting the eastern wing of the district" culminating in a "ghastly incident in which 42 persons, mostly women and children, were burnt alive". Struggle for fair wages unleashes the fury in un-imaginable magnitude, among the landlords on the downtrodden agricultural labour.

Scheduled Castes and Tribes in India

More than one-fifth of the India's population belongs to the category 'scheduled castes and scheduled tribes'. By the 1961 census, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes formed 14.6 per cent (6.44 crores) and 6.8 per cent (2.9 crores) of the country's total population. Every seventh person in India, on an average, belongs to scheduled caste category, while every fifteenth person in the country belongs to the tribal group.

The percentage of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to the total population, statewise, as per the 1961 census, is as given in the following table :

TABLE : 14.6

Name of the State	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Total
Andhra	13.82	3.68	17.50
Assam	6.17	17.29	23.56
Bihar	14.00	9.05	23.05
Gujarat	6.63	13.35	19.98
Jammu & Kashmir	7.98	—	7.98
Kerala	8.49	1.26	9.75
M. P.	13.14	20.63	33.77
Madras	18.01	0.75	18.76

Maharashtra	5.63	6.06	11.69
Mysore	13.22	0.81	14.03
Orissa	15.75	24.07	39.82
Punjab	20.38	0.07	20.45
Rajasthan	16.67	11.67	28.34
U. P.	20.88	—	20.88
West Bengal	19.73	5.88	25.61
INDIA	14.67	6.87	21.54

A statewise analysis of the distribution of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes shows that 25 per cent of the total scheduled caste population is concentrated in Uttar Pradesh and one-tenth, each, in Bihar and West Bengal. Half the tribal population in the country resides in the three states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and West Bengal. Nearly 90 per cent of the scheduled caste population and more than 97 per cent of the tribal population in the country is residing in the rural areas. They form 15.97 per cent and 8.16 per cent, respectively, of the rural population.

Literacy among the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population is very poor in India compared to the general literacy rate. The 1961 census shows that only 10 per cent of them are literates as against 24 per cent for the general Indian population. Among the literates, the majority constitute those who are "literate without education level".

The overwhelming majority of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribe people are in the rural areas, and most of them are engaged in agricultural labour. As such, the emancipation of these people cannot be achieved separately and in isolation from the general problem of rural poverty. This cannot be achieved without revolutionary redistribution of land and forcible and violent overthrow of landlordism. In short, the problem of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes can be solved only through a revolutionary change in the socio-economic structure of the country as a whole.

The State of Harijans

Economic Times produced a series of articles on the state of the Harijans in 1970. A few extracts reveal the fact that they - the lowest stratum in society both economically and socially - are being treated worse than serfs of medieval society.

IN PUNJAB : They have to live in Bastis away from the socially better-placed community. They are not permitted to draw water from wells of the people of 'high castes'. Although there are hand-pumps in the village, the Harijans are not allowed to touch them in Dehra village in Dera Basia sub-division. Last year, a socio economic survey was carried out, by the planning forum of the local Mahendra college, at village Daun Kalan, a model village in the vicinity of Patiala. It was found that though the village was economically well advanced, having a high school, a post office, an industrial training centre, a primary health centre, and other amenities, yet it was socially backward, so much so that the Harijans were not permitted to draw water from the wells of the localities. In the village high school, there was not a single student belonging to the scheduled castes though there was no bar on admission. The overall rise in prices has forced the landless labour to demand a better wage and, wherever they did so, they face resistance from the land-owning class. Trouble arose about three months ago when the foundation stone of a village school was laid by a Minister and the Gram Panchayat donated land for a playground of the school. Incidentally, the playground include a part of such land which was within 'lal-lakir' (residential units of the village) and was not 'shamlat' land within the meaning of Punjab village common lands Act. While donating the land the panchayat ignored the hard fact that the Harijan families would be put to great difficulty in case no passage was provided in front of their homes. A barbed wire was raised around their houses, by February 20, 1970. On March 22, a study team of the Punjab Pradesh Congress (R) led by its president Mr. Zail Singh visited the village and found entry to two houses completely blocked. **"Such incidents have multiplied during recent days throughout the state, because the police mostly acted as a silent spectator."**

The problem of untouchability is basically the problem of social and economic inequality. Harijans are considered a necessary cog in the age-old agricultural production system meant to provide cheap labour to the land-owning classes.

The old social order is resisting the new trends as a result of which a huge majority of Harijans are condemned.

Even after two decades of Independence, the social, economic conditions of scheduled castes in Punjab have not registered any marked improvement according to an official survey recently conducted in the state.

*A number of instances have been given in the report where other classes used their **economic power as one of the weapons** against those depressed classes in the villages, particularly in situations when the scheduled castes make attempts to exercise their rights. It has taken the shape of their eviction from land, discontinuance of their employment, and stoppage of their remuneration as village servants.*

The report pointed out that the per capita income of the scheduled castes population in the rural area of the state was Rs. 194 as against Rs. 483 for the general population for the year 1963-64 (Economic Times, June 29, 1970).

IN MADHYA PRADESH : (1) A Harijan labourer was prevented from working at the construction site of a temple.

- (2) In one case, in a temple constructed by Harijans themselves, they were prevented from offering worship.
- (3) In Mandazur, one Chamar bridegroom was made to get down from the horse on which he was riding, because it was the privilege of the caste Hindus.
- (4) Untouchability is also practiced in selected institutions. Reports are often received that, in the Panchayat meetings, elected Harijan members are made to squat on the floor, outside the main door of the meeting hall, while caste Hindu members occupy chairs.

"Various reasons are being listed for the ineffective enforcement of the untouchability law". One of the main reasons is "the indifference of the police towards such complaints. Such offences are generally committed by people of high caste, who also

happen to be influential persons of the area. In addition to this, feudal landlords furnished a large percentage of high government officials."

"Land to the landless Harijans is a perpetual demand in the state. Allegations of discrimination, partiality, favouritism, and watering down of the provision of the scheme of land reforms are often levelled by the representatives of the backward communities. In fact, the situation has become so explosive that unless the government evolves a fool-proof procedure, it might explode any day." (Economic Times, May 24, 1970).

IN MYSORE : Recently, a party of press men, who were taken to a village in Kolar district by some Harijan leaders, were shocked to find that Harijans are still prevented from drawing water from common wells and are literally ostracised by the higher castes.

As a result of age-old serfdom, the Harijans have almost lost their faculty of reacting to injustice. Thus, the inequities have been solidified by the rigid social stratification, of which the caste is the most significant manifestation. Political decentralisation, or panchayat raj, has strengthened their position further till by offering them more opportunities for political office and patronage. M. M. Srinivas, has described the inherent conflict of interests as follows :

"The rural elite has emerged as a class keenly conscious of the political and economic opportunities lying before it. It does not have any inhibitions about exploiting these opportunities to its own advantage A basic contradiction needs to be mentioned here. In implementing programmes for the benefit of rural areas, government officials tend to be guided by the rural leaders who are part of the rural elite. But it is forgotten that there is a fundamental conflict between the interests of the rural elite and the rural poor. The rural elite are, as a group, aggressive, acquisitive, and not burdened by feelings of guilt towards the people they exploit. Hierarchy and exploitation are so deep-seated in rural India that they are accepted without questioning. Neither the urban politician nor the administrator can do without the rural elite and the latter know it." (Yojana, October 1, 1961).

Thus democracy itself plays into the hands of petty plutocracy.

In such circumstances, it is no wonder that contradictions are growing in the rural areas going to the extent of violent clashes. Wherever and whenever the Harijans and other backward caste rural poor assert their social rights, or fight for better wages, the socially superior high-caste landlords make use of this division of caste to throttle this legitimate assertion of their rights by all violent means. There are innumerable instances of these people beaten and even killed appearing in the Press. There is no hideous crime that is not perpetrated against untouchables and backward classes.

Violence Stalks the Rural Scene

With the growth of the power of the rural elite, there is growing violence in the countryside. In recent years, unheard of atrocities committed against the poor in the rural area, especially on the low-caste section, have been growing in number. Social, economic and political contradictions are developing into direct confrontations, with landlords taking law into their own hands with a ferocity unheard of at any time in the past. The Ku Klux Klan is being outdone. Nazi atrocities in Germany on Jews are being re-enacted in India's countryside by the all-powerful feudal landlords. It is my opinion that armed landlords have created and are creating a situation, wherein there seems to be no way out except armed confrontation in defence of their legitimate rights by the rural poor.

According to the Union Home Ministry's information, 93 Harijans were done to death in different parts of the country in 1969. The office of the scheduled caste commissioner has reported 355 cases of harassment of Harijans, some of them involving rape and murder.

Rarely have the culprits been brought to book. Rarely is the violator of the law punished. This criminal indifference of the authorities is not accidental. These limbs of the State are closely linked with the upper strata of the society, which is the main rural base of the Government. Harijans, as agricultural workers and landless peasants, are the worst exploited not only economically but socially.

I propose to bring to the notice of the court various incidents that have been reported in the 'respectable' Press, from which it

is explicit that it is the landlords, under the supervision, blessing, and connivance of the administrators, who have been responsible for the violence in the country. I would like to ask : Is it not the legitimate duty of the people to counter violence with violence?

Let us first look at the facts - at the magnitude of the issue confronting us before we come to any conclusion. For, that would give us an idea of the type of feudal gangsterism stalking this land, an idea of the various issues involved and a glimpse of various methods adopted by the landlords.

Patriot on December 11, 1968, reported that an attack of armed gang on Harijan cultivators took place in Dharmkot-Zira section of Ferozepur district in Punjab. In this incident, huts were set on fire, crops were destroyed, and the cultivators were tied up and beaten. The paper remarks that it would not have been so disquieting but for the fact that it is the latest of a series of such outrages which have not been confined to one or two states. There have been a series of incidents all over the country in which Harijans were murdered, their women molested, and their dwellings smashed up. There is a sinister pattern in the way Harijans have in recent months been terrorised and bullied in A.P., M.P., U.P., Rajasthan and elsewhere. "Sympathetic noises from the top will not end this untenable situation. Drastic action to purge the administration of caste-mongers is the only alternative to the Harijans organising themselves for self defence."

Now let us take the incidents mainly in the years 1970-71.

National Herald of May 28, 1970, reports that 54 Harijans belonging to 13 families were rendered homeless after their homes were set on fire allegedly by a large group of caste Hindus on the midnight of May 20, in Masania vilage in Dhenkanal district of Orissa.

Statesman, August 7, 1970, reported that in Tamdei vilage of Sambalpur four brothers belonging to a Gonda (Harijan, family were burnt to death on July 18, over the question of fishing rights.

Indian Express, in an editorial on August 6, 1970, writes as follows : "In recent months, there have been several other instances of atrocities committed against Harijans primarily because of their being Harijans. Following a petty quarrel between a caste Hindu and some Harijans, all huts in the Harijans quarter of an Orissa vilage were set on fire in May. A shocked Rajya Sabha was recently

told by an M.P. from Maharashtra how a young Harijan woman was burnt to death in her state nearly two months ago. Reports about Harijans being tortured for drawing water from certain wells or for entering temples continue to come from many parts of the country.

"In most states the problem of untouchability is **getting mixed up with the question of land reforms** This has created new tensions in rural society dominated by the upper castes. The Bhubaneswar report about killing of some Harijans in a clash over possession of land in a village near Puri is a significant pointer. **The question of wages of farm labourers is another source of conflict.** The way the Harijans of a village near Patiala were harassed by the local panchayat a few months ago over the wage issue was truly incredible. Their houses were fenced off by barbed wire with the help of public funds because they refused to work for a daily wage of Rs. 2.50 which was less than half the nominal rate in the case of non-Harijans in the area.

"Even more shocking than these incidents is the apathy of the authorities. The state governments appear to have failed signally in securing for the Harijans their legitimate rights".

Patriot reports on December 20, 1970, an incident in which the Harijans were being evicted from the lands which they have been cultivating for quite a number of years.

"According to Bahadur Singh, sarpanch of the village Ganna Qind, in Phillavar tehsil in Jullundur district, Punjab, 24 Harijan families were allotted a plot of land by the government. After they had developed this land and installed a tubewell, one senior police officers of Ludhiana district, in collaboration with the revenue officer of the area, got the allotment cancelled. To get possession of the land he organised a police raid on the Harijans of this village in which one woman was seriously wounded. **A report was lodged and no action has been taken.**

"The story of Harijans of Talwand Canal is that one senior officer of co-operative societies is seeking to get Harijans evicted from the land in this village through bogus entries in the revenue records in favour of his relatives."

Times of India, March 24, 1971, reports that Choti Khatu, a fairly big village with a population of 4,000 wears a deserted look.

About 30 to 40 Baori (scheduled caste) families lived in and on the out skirts of the village. The 12 houses owned by the Baoris, some of them pucca, were demolished by miscreants. Four huts in the fields were burnt. The panic stricken villagers who fled have left behind all their possessions - rags, broken chappals, lanterns, charpoys, and flour grinding stones. Even earthen pots used for storing foodgrains were smashed and the grains were carried away.

Thirty-year-old Pipli, mother of five children said, "I and three others were dragged out of our houses on the evening of March 9 and beaten up mercilessly. Afterwards, some people brought Jarhwali, who was carrying her six year old child in her arms. She too was belaboured so, the child died in her arms".

Another woman also called Pipli, was beaten up and kicked despite being in an advanced stage of pregnancy. She gave premature birth the same day.

Times of India, March 26, 1971, reports about a social boycott of Harijans organised by the president of a village panchayat in Mysore State. How total the boycott was can be seen from the fact that the village grocer did not sell provisions to Harijans, the blacksmith and the potter refused to have any dealings with them, and even the priest barred their entry into the local temple.

"One panchayat in Punjab is said to have gone so far as to order Harijan houses to be 'walled off' from the rest of the village. Panchayats are supposed to foster democracy at the grass roots, but in practice many of them function like tiny oligarchies."

Patriot, June 21, 1971, reports on Kurja Harijans fleeing landlord terror. "About 15 Harijan families of a village in Bulandshahr district of U. P. have fled their homes following a reign of terror let loose by a big landlord there."

"It was the reluctance to do a certain job by a Harijan lad of 18 years that made the Harijan basti the victim of landlords anger, who threatened to shoot them and to escape it the 15 families fled their homes" and "are now in the capital, to meet and seek redressal from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and are camping under a big tree outside Teen Murthi".

"The landlord felt offended at the protestation of 18-year old Shohanlal, who, after working three or four hours of household

chores at the landlord's house was refused a break for tea, even though the boy went home only after he completed the work.

"Even so, the landlord felt aggrieved. He, along with his nephews, went to the boy's home and beat him. When his mother protested she too was kicked on the belly. The boy's young wife was treated in the same manner. When the boy's father who was then absent tried to raise the issue with the village panchayat, it refused to take cognisance of the incident. A complaint lodged with the police the next day has had no effect. On the other hand, the Harijans were told to settle the dispute with the landlord."

"When neither the boy nor his mother went to the landlord's house to do the household chores for the next two days, the landlord again visited the Harijan basti and threatened to shoot them all if they did not report for work the next day.

"Struck by terror, the Harijans collected whatever they could from their houses and fled in the night and reached Delhi by train from Khurja."

'Patriot', June 22, 1971, makes an editorial comment on the rural anger. The rural landlords practising their privileged morality have increasingly set regressive social standards across the country. Thakurs, Gounders or Reddys, they all use the Harijan ghettos outside the villages for the daily conscription of cheap labour, or dead of the night forays for women and will not concede them any civilised rights as part of society.

"There have been many Kanchikacharlas in Andhra Pradesh after the first tragedy, huts full of 'rebellious' Harijan labourers burnt in Kilvenmani, and many groups of terrorised men, women, and children, have fled U. P. border villages to Delhi and **there does not seem to be anything much any one can or will do** because most seem to accept that this is all part of the Indian condition - only some regretfully. The U. P. land - owner who threatened to shoot a family and drove them out of their village was only following standard practice. The outraged Gounders of the Coimbatore village, hit where it hurts most by the elopement of one of their girls with a Harijan boy, may be preparing for a small war of their own. **For both, police help is assured since force identified itself with the ruling** or powerful interests not the weaker sections Though 'dadas' are emerging among the Harijans who will sell the community's interests, **it looks as**

though a rural confrontation of some magnitude is inevitable unless the police are de-linked from the land-owners and the State apparatus moves to protect the weaker sections."

Blitz, August 21, 1971, reports how in Kanail village, in Gorakhpur, a Harijan boy, Samuru, was tied to 'Khamia' and beaten by an ex-zamindar whose fields he refused to plough when the zamindar insisted the boy should work free for him as his family and fore-fathers allegedly owed him Rs. 1,32,000.

"Denying the existence of a slave trade amongst the tribals of Wynad, Kerala's Minister for Harijan Welfare admitted that there was a system under which the tribal people were tied down by contract for a particular period to individual landlords."

"A marriage party of Harijans was allegedly beaten up by Rajputs in Bikaner village temple, while in Ganganagar district a Harijan was beheaded and thrown in a well."

Statesman, August 22, 1971, reports that Harijans were stunned by the announcement of social boycott, made in Duneka village, two miles from here (Moga) last night.

"The Harijans were told by the beat of drum that they would not be allowed to step on farms owned by the people in the village."

"The social boycott reportedly follows the Harijans' demand for wages in excess of the rates fixed by villagers of the area."

Patriot, September 2, 1971, reports the ejection of Harijan cultivators of common land in the village Kheri Ganeran, 12 miles from Patiala, which has whipped up tension in the village.

"The total area of the village common land is 380 bighas of which 107 bighas had been leased out to Harijans for cultivation for the last several years by the village panchayat. Now, the entire common land area in the village is in the possession of the high caste cultivators."

Patriot, September 2, 1971, Mr. Sundarsing, General Secretary, Congress Legislature Party, today alleged that the Harijans in Punjab were being harassed and ousted from their land. He also alleged that the Harijans were being killed on the false pleas that they had become Naxalites.

Times of India, September 8, 1971, in 'Current Topics' says : "How can Harijans be blamed for feeling that there is built in

hostility against them in the administration? A new road had been constructed in a village in South Arcot district of Tamil Nadu for their 'exclusive' use. It appears that the caste-Hindus of the village objected to the pollution of the regular road by the Harijans."

The conscience of the ruling class is shocked when they hear that South African whites put up boards for railway compartments and hotels. "Dogs and Blacks Not Allowed". Yet this 'soft-hearted' ruling class is no worse in their treatment of village poor.

Hindu, September 10, 1971, reports two cases of assaulting scheduled caste persons for entering a temple, figures today in the Maharashtra Assembly during question hour.

One incident occurred in Deogaon village Ahmednagar district on April 20. In another incident, a 60-year old person of the same caste was beaten up by a sarpanch of Govhan village in Sangli district on May 22 last as he entered a Hanuman temple.

"When the opposition members demanded disclosure of the names of **the accused the Minister expressed his inability to furnish them.** He, however, promised to produce the names in a day or two according to the direction of the Speaker".

Patriot, of September 11, 1971, reports of terror stricken Harijans fleeing a Rajasthan hamlet. Palwala Jataun, a small village in Bassi tehsil of Jaipur district in Rajasthan is today without a single Harijan. All the 40 Harijan families of the village have fled their homes in the wake of terror let loose against them.

"The incident was a sequel to the **village cobblers refusal to mend free of charge** the footwear of the caste Hindus. Such refusal was contrary to the traditions still followed in many Rajasthan villages that the cobblers mend old footwear of these persons free of charge."

"A mob of caste - Hindus started wanton attacks on Harijans, indulged in arson and looting. About 10 Harijan houses were turned to ashes."

"These people (Harijans who had come to the capital) complain that in many villages the Jats and the Thakurs were terrorising the Harijans. They had virtually made it impossible for any cobbler to live in the village. They also sometimes forcibly occupied the lands of Harijans or deliberately destroyed the

standing crops from their fields".

Times of India, in an editorial on September 15, 1971, says : "There is hardly a week which does not bring to light a fresh instance of the practice of grossest kind of discrimination on grounds of caste." After giving the instance of denying the use of public road to Harijans in a village in South Arcot, the editorial says that, this is a case "not just of discrimination but a reign of terror instituted with impunity under the very nose of government that reveals in anti-Brahmin militancy".

"The Harijan village is so defenceless today that, even where he knows he has been wronged and authority is ready to help him secure justice, he does not dare complain for fear of reprisals from the privileged part of the community, which, as the South Arcot example shows, can make life impossible for him. **Land reforms have helped flatten the agrarian pyramid but not touched the base.**"

"**The result has been a sharpening of tensions between land owning caste Hindus and landless Harijans.** Social thrust of the Green Revolution is in the same direction."

Patriot, September 18, 1971, talks of casteism running amock in Behara. "The Harijans of Behara, victims of a barbarous assault, are bitterly complaining that the days of serfdom are not yet over".

"The chamars of the village traditionally remove the dead animals. It has been obligatory all along as a part of the job of the landless labour **whose current wages are Rs. 3 a month and half kg. of coarse grain a day.**"

"At a meeting on Sunday, the chamars decided not to remove dead animals any longer. The decision was unanimous".

On Tuesday, a group of caste Hindus, some Thakurs and other influential persons, ransacked the Harijan basti ; their shed roofs were set ablaze. Pots and pans were broken. Women and children were beaten up indiscriminately. The rampaging crowd did not leave until they killed one person. It is believed that the object of the attack was to terrorise them into continuing to perform the traditional services.

Times of India, September 21, 1971, reports how a **Rajasthan**

Harijan tribe fights exploitation. The Reghars, a community of scheduled caste people, have fled Palawala, Ramura, Paterha and Bakri villages in Jaipur district following a series of clashes with the landowning caste Hindus the past two months.

It is socio-economic tensions that have led to these clashes. "Part of the trouble is traceable to politicians who have been resisting socio-economic changes in the countryside."

FEUDAL RELATIONS : The Reghars had for decades been skinning cattle, tanning hides, manufacturing and repairing **charas** (leather buckets) for drawing water from the wells - and repairing old shoes.

"While they used to be paid cash for providing new **charas**, they had to accept foodgrains at harvest time for the rest of their services."

"With the growing socio-political consciousness, these arrangements are no longer acceptable to the community of Reghars. With the growing money economy, it is but natural that the Reghars are insisting on wages in cash for their services."

"A large number of meetings have been held over the past few months to press the demand for a better deal for the Reghars. At one of these meetings the Reghars decided not to skin cattle or repair old **charas** and shoes unless paid in cash".

To counter this agitation of the Reghars, "the farmers set up Kisan Sangharsh Samithi to hit back at the Reghars". The Samithi decided to impose social boycott on the Reghars. They took back the fields leased out to Reghars on a share - cropping basis. The Reghars were also banned from grazing their cattle in common grazing lands. They were prevented from going to their fields or houses through traditional short-cuts. They were not allowed to draw water from private wells. The supply of provision from village shops was stopped.

At Palewala, 300 to 400 Jats and Brahmins with their servants surrounded the houses of the Reghars, beat up the men and women, as well as children, and looted their property.

At Bakri, the Reghars were prevented from taking water from a private well.

In some instances, the Reghars were prevented from taking

possession of land allotted to them by the government.

"Despite these reprisals, the Reghars seem determined not to repair old **charas** or shoes. They are equally bent on not accepting foodgrains in lieu of wages."

LAND FOR THE POOR : As this demand of the landless poor, the bulk of whom belong to the scheduled castes, continues to grow in intensity, the Congress government more and more has intensified its propaganda of land reforms on one hand and has been stealthily helping a concerted move to oust them even from the small bits of land that agricultural labour possessed. The following bit of information in Patriot of September 14, 1971, is of interest.

"In Porbandar taluk of Gujarat, 20 Harijan families have been driven out of a village where they had lived for generations, their crime being that they owned small places of agricultural land."

"In the Patiala district of Punjab, influential persons are in illegal possession of Nazul land transferred to Harijans, in connivance with the officials."

"In U. P. districts of Bulandshahr, Agra, Hamirpur, Nainital, Baharaich, etc., what was revealed by the preliminary survey reports of distribution of fallow land to the landless is disconcerting. In the majority of the cases, land has been found to be allotted by the village land management committees to those who already own big slices of land or have other sources of income, as per the provision of the existing land law which treats even a person, whose parents own enough land, as landless." Though the government claims that most of the waste and surplus land has been distributed among the scheduled castes and from time to time produces impressive statistics to substantiate it, in actual fact hardly any land has come into their physical possession."

"Under the circumstances, if the scheduled castes plan direct action, they are more than justified. It is also widely alleged that the authorities are resorting to a more suitable device to deprive the Harijans and other poorer people of the land they had been in possession of for generations, by acquiring them for public purposes. Cases of land acquired for Meerut University along the Ghat Road and for other similar public purposes in

Aligarh are being cited in this connection."

Desperate Fury Inevitable

These incidents cannot be dismissed as these unrelated to the class war now aging in our country in various forms. Some of the problems in rural India of today arise from the fact that economic relations which have become outdated still persist in our villages due to the unbalanced economic development of India.

The traditional system of caste interdependence, under which poor peasants and labouring class mainly belonging to lower castes attached themselves to the landlord families, still persists.

Those people belonging to the upper castes, who had previously lived on tributes and taxes from the producing and serving castes as feudal rent-receivers, maintained their social and economic domination under British rule in the newly evolving class structure. Their rule in society was further established and strengthened after the comprador bourgeoisie and the landlords took over power from British imperialism. The co-operatives, bank loans, better seeds, fertilisers, and other economic benefits which the rich classes, belonging to the upper castes received, along with the establishment of panchayats, samithis, and zilla parishads, which gave them a direct link with the administration from bottom to top strengthened them not only economically but also politically.

On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of the low-caste people, the serving castes, remained at the bottom of society as landless and semi-landless labourers.

Thus, though certain changes did take place in society, these were mainly within the caste system of the feudal structure, instead of breaking away from the institution. Forms may have changed but fundamentally caste remains the same.

The reason for this is that, during all these years, there was no fundamental change in the character of the Indian economy which remains essentially semi-feudal and semi-colonial in character. Even the distinction of wealth in an economy of commodity production led to further intensification of the caste institutions. As Ranjit Das Gupta in his book "Problems of Economic

Transition" states :

"Planning efforts and various agricultural development programmes, including the much lauded new agricultural development policies, helped to increase disparities between region to region and between different strata within a region benefiting most the large land-owners and the upper strata of the peasantry [and has given] a new life to this hierarchical caste structure and even strengthened it in certain respects in the rural areas."

"The dimension of the problems flowing from the pervasive persistence of the inequalitarian caste structure is revealed by reports of burning alive of women and children of Harijan agricultural labourers in Tanjavur district of Tamil Nadu and the spate of violence against scheduled castes going on widely in separate parts of the country".

This "solid foundation of oriental despotism", as Marx brilliantly exposed, continues to exist with all its ferocity, strengthening "stagnatory, undignified and vegetative life", "contaminated by distinctions of caste and slavery".

But the rural masses are awakening. Slowly, but steadily, a sense of revolt against economic and social despotism is growing. "While the promises given to rural masses are belied", writes Yogesh Vajpeyi in National Herald in his series of articles on 'Indian Village', "awareness is dawning among the sufferers that this state of affairs cannot be tolerated any more". And the villagers are **realising that the tables cannot be turned upside down by playing the game according to rules of those at the top.** "This is a dangerous stage, for after the realisation that the conventional means are ineffective comes desperation, and direct action germinating out of desperate fury is rather uncontrollable."

(National Herald, May 10, 1970).

It is no wonder that the masses have come to believe that "It is utterly useless to professedly use merely legal means of resistance against an enemy which scorns such scruples." (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels : "German Revolution and Counter-Revolution", Page 110).

Therefore, if the class character of the revolt of the exploited some-times expresses itself in certain castes, and if the suppression of the downtrodden exploited classes takes the character of a brutal war against certain castes, it in no way obscures the basic character of class struggle. During British rule, the rural masses were so much steeped in the motion of caste and communal segregation that even their political and economic revolts sometimes took a peculiarly obscurantist character, as was the case with the Mopla Revolt in Malabar.

Here is how Engels, the greater partner of the founder of scientific socialism, Karl Marx, analyses the so-called religious wars of Medieval Europe; *"Even the so-called religious wars of the sixteenth century involved positive material class interests; those wars were class wars, too, just as the later internal collisions in England and France. Although the class struggles of the day were clothed in religious shibboleths and though the interests, requirements, and demands of the various classes were concealed behind a religious screen, this changed nothing in the matter and is easily explained by the conditions of the time the revolutionary opposition to feudalism was alive all down the middle ages. It took the shape of mysticism, open heresy, or armed insurrection, all depending on the conditions of the time."*

("The Peasant War in Germany").