

TEN DECISIVE YEARS FOR INDIA

By LIVIO MAITAN

In these last years, the real situation in India has often been presented in a deforming mirror. For MacCarthy-type ultras, India was a country suffering from the virus of neutralism, which therefore had to be considered as a field of manoeuvre for the most insidious actions by the "communists." For "enlightened" bourgeois, on the contrary, it was the scene of an advanced "democratic" experiment whose results were to belie certain basic criteria of Marxism and Leninism and refute the need of a "Chinese way" to solve the distressing problems of under-developed countries. In the workers' movement itself, a tendency was prevalent to engage in apologetics on its behalf: at the time of the XXth Congress the Indian example served as a demonstration of the particular nature of the paths to follow in reaching socialism, and Nehru was even awarded "diplomas" as a socialist or a semi-socialist.¹ Even recently, interpretations that are, to say the least, surprising can be read concerning the nature of present-day India and the aims pursued by its ruling class.²

In these last months, nevertheless, events of some importance ought to have inspired greater vigilance concerning apologetic judgments. At the end of July, Nehru proclaimed the dissolution, by an act that was undemocratic in both form and substance, of the only government in the Indian Union which his party did not dominate. A month later, demonstrations by the starving masses of Calcutta were broken up by bloody repression. Still during this same period, a skilfully conducted campaign exploited frontier incidents for the obvious purpose of creating a current of nationalism and strengthening anti-Chinese feelings even in the popular masses.

¹ Togliatti, in his March 1955 report to the Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party, considered it timely to attribute importance to the fact that "the Indian Congress Party, which is the government party, has declared that it intends to reorganize the country's economy in accordance with the principles of socialism," whereas elsewhere, obviously referring to India and the Kerala experiment, he concluded: "...the example of poorly developed countries where the Communist movement is, without violence, drawing close to power." (Cfr *Rinascita*, 5 May 1957, p 248.)

² We allude in particular to the article in *Avanti* (Milan edition, 29 October 1959, "Socialist World" column), in which, in defiance of the most elementary data, it is claimed among other things that "India, on the whole, even if its rulers do not every 24 hours make claim to a precise ideological choice, proves that it has assimilated the main teachings of Marxism, and we think that we are not mistaken in saying that it is adopting a national path of its own toward socialism."

These are three episodes situated on different planes but which, just because of that, could provide indications about the real situation in India and the present tendencies of its ruling class. If so little benefit was drawn therefrom, it is because, even in the workers' movement, motifs of propaganda and apologetics — which must confirm well-determined general theses or more or less "new" formulae — continue to be preferred to the direct analysis of reality and all the elements that go to make it up.

REALITIES AND ILLUSIONS IN THE FIVE-YEAR PLANS

One of the most characteristic experiments of independent India is unquestionably that of the Five-Year Plans, one of which was completed a few years ago, a second is now going on, and a third is in the drafting stage. It is known that it is just concerning these plans — and certain proclamations that have accompanied them³ — that people have been tempted to describe contemporary India as "socialist" or "substantially socialist." We shall return to this point, but let us first of all tackle the problem from the viewpoint of practical achievements.

It is hardly necessary to say that, the starting-point being very low, there was never in any case a question of reaching, in five or even ten years, considerable absolute levels. On the other hand, however, it ought to have been relatively easy to obtain big percentage increases. And yet even this second point has not been attained.

At the time that the policy of plans was adopted, what were especially put forward were long-range goals. There was talk of doubling the national income in about 15 years and the per capita revenue in 20 or more years.⁴ Consumption would have increased — according to other estimates — by a little less than 77% up to 1977.

It will immediately be seen that — even granting that such goals may be reached (which is far from being self-evident) — little will have been done in 10 or 15 years to solve the dramatic problems of India and its population. It suffices to think of the extremely modest value of a doubled per capita income when it is remembered that this income was, in 1944-55, of about 270 rupees [1 rupee = \$0.20 or 1s 5d], i.e., less than

³ There was official talk of a "socialistic pattern of society."

⁴ According to more pessimistic calculations, it is only in 1977 that it will be possible to double the per capita income. (Cfr *India: a Reference Annual*, 1959, p 200.)

half the income of the inhabitant of a country like Ceylon, itself backward.⁵

The first plan was to confirm the modest nature of the goals set. It suffices to take as an example investments, which were maintained at between 5% and 6% of the national income (raised to 7% during the last year), which means that they did not go beyond the annual average of the period of British domination. The greatest part of investments was reserved for irrigation and agriculture, whereas industry was attributed, in the overall plan, only a little more than 5% of the total investments.⁶

The final result is that the national income has increased 18.4% — representing about 3.6% per year — while the increase in per capita income was even more limited (only 10.8%).⁷ The index of agricultural production showed an increase of about 20%, an increase of small importance if the population increase during the same period is taken into consideration. What is more, in the general opinion, even this result could be attained only thanks to exceptional weather conditions (whereas those same conditions had been unfavorable in the year which served as the point of comparison).⁸

An obviously more important increase — of about 40%, or 8% per year — was achieved by industry. It is proper to note, however, that this advance took place especially in private industry and not in the public sector that was directly affected by the plan. In addition, though considerable percentage increases were obtained in certain sectors (e.g. the electrical industry), in other important sectors the situation was quite different: substantially they remained at the level of the war years, a level that sometimes was not even reached.⁹

The Second Plan was based on perceptibly dif-

ferent criteria concerning the distribution of investments and had more ambitious goals (the rate of investment was raised to 10-12%). The accent was placed on the requirements of the development of industry, to which 19% of the investments were reserved, whereas a reduction of 5% was foreseen for agriculture. The increase in the national income was to be higher than in the preceding plan and to reach about 5% per year.¹⁰ A particularly important increase was planned for the steel industry.¹¹ As for agricultural production, the increase was to be in the neighborhood of 18% (15% for food grains), that is to say, already at the outset it was lower than what had already been achieved under the preceding plan.

This Second Plan is to end in 1961, and it is therefore a little early to draw an overall trial balance, all the more so in that the indispensable statistics are provided with a certain time-lag. But the impossibility of a complete achievement of the plan was rapidly demonstrated, to the degree that the authorities were led to reevaluate the real possibilities after two years' experience. In practice the goals have been lowered and certain ones have been put in a category for which there is talk about conditional achievement. What is worse is that according to certain indications there is some skepticism about the possibilities of achieving even the thus revised programme.

In the official document announcing this revision, while the causes indicated were inflationary tendencies and foreign-exchange difficulties, it was admitted that in the final period of the First Plan the national income had increased less than 4% per year, while agricultural production had begun to fall off compared to the level attained in 1953-54.¹²

As for the first years of the new plan, the production of finished steel, after having made an insignificant advance in 1957 over 1956, recorded a falling off in 1958 (even compared to 1956). An analogous drop was recorded in rolled iron and in cement production. A drop was already noted in 1957 in the production of products made of jute and cotton, which represent a quite important sector for the Indian economy, and in the sugar industry.¹³

The situation in agriculture was even more serious. Not only has no progress been possible since 1953-54, but a drop in the indices has been

⁵ For a period of the same length, the per capita income was 9,410 rupees in the USA, 4,351 in Great Britain, and 978 in Japan (cfr A B Das — M N Chatterji: *The Indian Economy, Its Growth and Problems*, 1957, p 1). During the following years, the increase in income in India was modest (273 rupees in 1955-56 and 284 [provisional figure] in 1956-57).

⁶ Investments for transportation were of the same importance.

⁷ Per capita consumption increased still less, about 8%.

⁸ Cfr Das — Chatterji: op cit, p 534-535. Cfr also — and not only in this connection — Ernest Germain: "L'Economie indienne du 1er au 2ème Plan Quinquennal" in *Quatrième Internationale*, October 1955.

⁹ Steel production during the First Plan was about 1,070,000 tons, while it had reached 1,250,000 tons at the beginning of 1940. Concerning fabricated steel, the increase from 1941 to 1956 was about 20%, whereas for rolled iron the level reached in 1956 was lower than that of 1939 (cfr *India 1959*, p 323). Let us recall that the general economic conjuncture was, in certain aspects, favorable (results of the post-Korean boom, absence of inflationary tendencies, etc).

¹⁰ Cfr Das — Chatterji, op cit, pp 399 et seq.

¹¹ From 1,300,000 to 4,300,000 tons; cfr *ibidem*, p 545.

¹² Cfr the official publication, *Appraisal and Prospects of the Second Five-Year Plan*, p 3. For the relative pessimism about the possibilities of application, cfr *ibidem*, p 19, and "The Plan" in *The Times of India*, 1 September 1959.

¹³ Cfr *India 1959*, pp 320-23.

recorded. The drop between 1956-57 and 1957-1958 was particularly perceptible.¹⁴

That means not only that the goals of the plan are not being and probably will not be attained, but that the already grave problem of agriculture will have a tendency to become even more acute. Even in the most favorable period, the increases in absolute amounts were scarcely sufficient to face up to the population increase, and even this at a frightfully low level of satisfaction of this population's needs. In case of a sag in this production, there is no other way out except an increase in imports, with all the negative consequences for overall economic development that can easily be imagined (it must not be forgotten to what a degree foreign-exchange difficulties have played a role already in these three years). But even this solution — without substantial changes — can be only an inadequate palliative if it is true, as is claimed, that, continuing the present rhythm, the difference between food resources and the population's needs will reach 25% in 1965, and that the minimum to sustain life could be ensured only by an annual increase of more than 8% in the production of grains.¹⁵ On the basis of overall postwar development, including the period of the Five-Year Plans, an absolutely pessimistic outlook is justified. If new factors do not intervene, and with strong influence, this essential inadequacy in agricultural development can have incalculable political and social repercussions on the structure of Indian society as a whole. The first element of a break might appear on just this plane.

Given the adoption of planning and the "socialist" intentions that go with it, it might be thought that, within the general limits of the Indian industrial economy, the role of the public sector, administered or directly controlled by the state, has been important. In fact, this is not so.

Granted, at the beginning the intentions were excellent and immediately after independence ideas of nationalizations circulated, even officially. But in fact it was to be decided later not to nationalize, the state limiting itself to administering and controlling the newly set-up industrial enterprises.¹⁶ In the industrial investments of the

¹⁴ The general index has shown the following trend between 1952-53 and 1957-58 (1949-50 = 100): 102.0, 114.3, 117.9, 123.8, 113.4. For grains, in the same period: 101.4, 120.1, 114.5, 114.9, 119.9, 108.3.

¹⁵ In a Ford Foundation report on the food situation in India, these elements are given, and it is specified: "It is impossible to conceive of an import and rationing programme that can cope with a crisis of this scope." (Re-translated from *Le Monde*, 11 July 1959.) Charles Bettelheim, for his part, states that "in 1966 the harvest deficit will be about 30 million tons of grains." (Cfr *Il Punto*, 1 August 1959.)

¹⁶ On the subject of the evolution of official ideas on this

First Plan, the public sector found itself clearly at a disadvantage. The Second Plan was satisfied to establish a balanced proportion, which meant that the specific weight of private industry would remain preponderant.¹⁷ Thus, as has been observed even in certain circles which, in the past, indulged in certain exalting apologetics, in reality the public sector in India is even more reduced than in certain capitalist countries of Western Europe.¹⁸

WORKERS' WAGES AND LIVING CONDITIONS

What has been the evolution of the remuneration of workers during these last ten years?

Even though, from this point of view as well, the inadequacy of official statistics is to be regretted, there exist sufficient indications to trace out a general chart of the situation.

Especially concerning the total of wages and profits compared to the net product of industry, it has been possible to assemble the following data:¹⁹

(Figures in crores of rupees; 1 crore = 10 million)

	1950	1954	1955
Net product	528.6 (100)	732.6 (136)	775.5 (145)
Wages	236.4 (100)	292.3 (123)	319.5 (135)
Profits	292.2 (100)	440.3 (150)	456.0 (156)
Percentages of wages on product	44.7	39.9	41.1

The percentage of wage income thus appears to have fallen. In other terms, a relative impoverishment seems to have been demonstrated even during this period.

point, and of the different categories that were set up for the development of the public and private sectors, cfr Das-Chatterji, op cit, pp 237-242.

¹⁷ Here are data for new investments in industry:

	Public Sector		Private Sector	
	Forecasts	Achievements	Forecasts	Achievements
1st Plan	94	60	233	233
2nd Plan	524	—	535	—

(Figures are in crores of rupees; 1 crore = 10 million.)

In general, furthermore, the relationship between public and private investments was 50/50 in the First Plan and should have been 61/39 in the Second Plan.

¹⁸ Cfr *L'Unità*, 12 December 1959.

¹⁹ Cfr *General Report at Ernakulam*, by S A Dange, the secretary-general of the AITUC (Communist-controlled trade-union federation), p 28.

Official indications about the parallel development of labor productivity and real wages unfortunately are not available for later than 1954, but the comparison with the starting-point (1939=100) is nevertheless interesting. The wage index rises to 108.6 in 1940, to fall again in 1943 to 67.0 and in 1946 to 73.2. There is then a new rise (with one brief interruption) until 1952 (101.8), whereas we find 99.9 for 1953 and 102.7 for 1954. The 1954 index figure is thus lower than that of 1940 and 1941. Even the increase in productivity seems modest, but it is at any rate more perceptible than that of wages: 1940, 104.2; 1943, 84.5; 1946, 74.7; 1953, 105.8; 1954, 113.²⁰

The data concerning the development of wages considered by themselves are not very complete, both because of the references, and because they are sometimes limited to nominal wages. But in general the rises which have been proved during the First Plan were very limited, not to call them drops in real terms as demonstrated between 1956 and 1958.²¹

The observable stagnation of remunerations or the modesty of their increase (and a fortiori their occasional decrease) does not, however, appear in all its gravity unless there is taken into account the fact that the absolute level was and still is extraordinarily low. The national average of annual wages distributed in 1956 was in fact 1,212.7 rupees (running from a maximum of 1,525.9 to a minimum of 786.4). In that year a textile worker received an average of 1,244.5, a metal-trades worker 1,487.9, and an oil worker 1,686.2 rupees.²²

In September 1959 the author had the opportunity to meet trade-union leaders and workers of the textile industry, both in Bombay — where there exists an important concentration of them, several hundred thousand workers strong — and in Madras — where, among others, the Buckingham Garnatic, with 15,000 workers, is situated. According to the information he gathered there, a worker's monthly salary was about

120 rupees at Bombay, while it was a little lower in Madras, scarcely reaching 100 rupees (at Buckingham, highly skilled workers — who form about 10% of the total — can, however, reach 200 to 250 rupees).

Since a rupee is roughly equivalent to twenty US cents, or 1s5d — even if it is realized that more can be bought with five rupees in India than with a dollar in the USA — anyone can observe to what a point these remunerations are ridiculous. According to the personal observations of the author, in Bombay the monthly rent of the most modest of rooms is between 15 and 20 rupees a month, a pair of blue jeans or a work-shirt costs between 15 and 18 rupees, a pair of sandals 4 to 5 rupees, while a pound of rice cost about half a rupee, as does a pound of bread.²³ In the factories the workers can get a miserable meal for 37 rupee cents, while they can eat in a very humble restaurant for half a rupee.

But statistical data and figures can give only a pale idea of the tragic conditions of the popular masses in India. To learn that a Bombay textile worker has to give up between 15 and 20% of his quite miserable wages to have a room means very little in itself: to understand it, one must see what he gets for it in the houses of popular neighborhoods.

In Bombay the workers live generally in slums or sometimes in small villages on the outskirts. Worli is one of these villages, where workers and fishermen live together. The tiny low-ceilinged houses are huddled together in an incredible way, separated only by little alleys of an indescribable filthiness. There is no sanitation, the results of which can easily be imagined. Half-naked children root in the swill, together with animals; they are undernourished and suffer from every kind of disease. The houses seem to be collapsing at every point, and the water leaks abundantly into them during the rainy season. The author was invited to enter the house of an office-worker: a tiny kitchen and a more-or-less square room six feet by six. The family consisted of two adults and four children. They claimed to be the privileged ones of the neighborhood because they could afford to pay a rent of 20 rupees. Another "privileged" person was employed by the Bombay municipality: 72 rupees a month. He lives in a sort of big five-storey barracks built around a large inside courtyard. The "apartments" are composed of a tiny kitchen and a room (ranging from six by nine feet to nine by twelve feet), in which lives this "privileged" man's family — consisting of 12 persons.

²⁰ Cfr *India 1959*, p 389.

²¹ A comparison with 1947 (before the adoption of the Minimum Wages Act) gives an index figure of 131 in 1954, 145 in 1955, and 135 in 1956 (real wages). (Cfr *India 1959*, p 391). Statistics on nominal wages (1951=100) give about 107 up till 1954, 113 in 1955, and 115.9 in 1956. (Cfr "Earnings of Factory Workers during the Year 1956" in *Indian Labour Gazette*, March 1958, p 22.) If, however, the evolution of prices (1949, 100; 1954, 101; 1955, 96; 1956, 105 — cfr *India 1959*, p 302) is taken into account, there is observed in 1956, in comparison with 1955, a drop. For the situation in 1958, cfr S A Dange, *Crisis and Workers*, 1959, p 68. It is again Dange who, in the already quoted work, *General Report at Ernakulam*, stresses the fact that in 1954 the wage level was more or less the same as in 1939 (p 24).

²² Cfr the already quoted "Earnings of Factory Workers [etc]," pp 13-15.

²³ These are, obviously, approximate indications, especially when the diversity of weights and measures is taken into account.

In the slums conditions are still more agonizing. The buildings are very large and resemble schools or barracks. One makes one's way through interminable corridors, a hundred and fifty feet or more long, half-dark and very dirty. When it rains, it seems that one wades in them ankle-deep in water. The "apartments" consist of single rooms giving on these corridors; they are real dens in each of which live four or five entire families. It is easy to understand why, at night, it can happen that one finds himself stepping on people lying in the corridors.²⁴

Bombay is the most advanced city, and, by unanimous opinion, Calcutta has for example the worst rooms. And this is not to mention the real semi-savage huts which characterize the countryside in India.²⁵ In the lowest circle on this inferno are to be found the worst-off among the masses, the unemployed, without resources of any sort, who, hundreds of thousands of them, do literally cover the sidewalks at night in the most important cities.

AGRICULTURAL INDIA

However serious the obstacles to industrial development may be, and however worrisome the problems faced by the city masses, it is however in the countryside that we touch on the most dramatic problems of this sub-continent, which is still today very definitively peasant.²⁶ It is in agricultural production that, despite the Plans, stagnation is the most pronounced; it is in the rural regions that the past makes its paralyzing weight the most felt; it is there that the old social divisions are the most persistent, the destitution the most deeply rooted; it is there also that there are to be counted tens of thousands of unemployed or under employed, who constitute, among the

infinite number of India's sores, what is probably the most painful one.²⁷

The most characteristic elements in Indian agriculture can be rapidly summarized. The land is still very little used, and only 19% of the terrain is worked, while only 15% of the arable land is irrigated.²⁸ Production for family consumption continues to be very important, while productivity is very low, as is per capita yield.²⁹ The break-down of farms into little parcels is very considerable, and indeed often pathological.³⁰ The results of the foregoing factors are easily understood. We shall not dwell upon the general living conditions in the rural regions: quite clear indications show them to be worse than those in the cities.³¹ We shall only make a brief comment on the situation of agricultural workers.

This category of labor has in India undergone a continuous development to reach the impressive figure of 50 million units, which represents about 20% of the agricultural population as a whole.³² The tragedy that torments them — and that is really the word for it — is under-employment: about 85% of agricultural workers work only part-time. The average of working days in the year is a little over 200, including days occupied in non-agricultural tasks; besides which, 15% of the workers of this category are unemployed during the entire year.³³ And even when one of them has the good luck to get a day's work, the

²⁴ Public housing ventures are absolutely inadequate. What is more, it often seems to be impossible for workers and clerks to pay the relatively high rents for apartments that are nevertheless still very modest (in Bombay, for example, in the Worli district, there are houses for the middle classes — one room, a kitchen, a veranda, sanitation — with a rent between 50 and 70 rupees).

²⁵ Along the route from Bombay to Calcutta Bihlai, where the steel-plants installed by the Soviets are situated, there is an oasis of modern life, characterized by the most advanced technical achievement. But all around it, a myriad of old huts and even tents give a picture of combined development in a country like India. What is worse is that the majority of the steel workers themselves live in conditions defined as revolting by a recent Socialist "investigation." Water and sanitation are lacking, and 20,000 workers are living in huts. Last year about 1000 dead were recorded as a result of cholera (cfr *The Leader*, 7 September 1959).

²⁶ According to a census taken in 1951, the rural population represented 82.7% of the total (cfr *India 1959*, p 45). In 1956-57 about 50% of the national income still came from agriculture (ibidem, p 189).

²⁷ Chester Bowles, who was the American ambassador in New Delhi, spoke of about 50 million totally or partially unemployed, while the estimates dating from the period of the First Plan counted about 70 million of them. According to Bettelheim, "...about 40% of the Indian rural population are excluded from the circuit of production or participate therein only for a very limited number of working days." As for unemployment in the cities, very grave in certain great centres (about 350,000 people in Calcutta), cfr *India 1959*, pp 192-3 (the data provided are probably very much lower than the reality).

²⁸ The cultivated land represents 38% of the geographical surface and 61% of the topographically usable surface (cfr *India 1959*, pp 195 and 251; cfr also *The Indian Economy*, p 76).

²⁹ Cfr Das-Chatterji, *The Indian Economy*, pp 57-59. Per capita production was estimated for 1950-51 at 500 rupees for agriculture, whereas it was 1,700 for industry, 1,600 for transportation, and 800 for small enterprises (cfr *India 1959*, p 19).

³⁰ Cfr two significant examples in Das-Chatterji, *The Indian Economy*, p 65, and statistical elements in *India 1959*, p 196.

³¹ According to an investigation carried out from August to November 1951, average monthly expenditure per person was 24.22 rupees in the country and 31.55 in the cities as a whole (54.82 in the four most important cities). (Cfr *India 1959*, p 197).

³² In 1882 agricultural workers were 7.5 million; this figure rose to 33 million by 1931, and to 49 million by 1951 (cfr *The Indian Economy*, p 110, and *India 1959*, p 265). In certain states it reaches 45%. (Cfr *Some Aspects of the Agrarian Question*, 1958, p 8.)

³³ Cfr *India 1959*, pp 265-6; *The Indian Economy*, p 111.

daily pay is in the best of cases less than 1.5 rupees for the men, while it reaches scarcely half a rupee for the women and children. Thus, in the course of a year during which the average per capita income for the entire country was 264 rupees, there were only 104 for these disinherited among the disinherited.³⁴

This picture of Indian agriculture and of peasant India is so sombre that it has become commonplace to seek the origins of the evil in the economic-social structures. The ruling class itself has had to raise the problem of agrarian reform. Let us pause then at this important chapter in the history of independent India.

The structure of the Indian rural regions is characterized by the existence of a class of non-land-working proprietors who receive a considerable amount of ground rent,³⁵ and by the fact that, as happens in backward countries where important residues of the pre-capitalist period persist, the burden of the working peasants is aggravated by the percentages of intermediaries, usurers, and parasites of very sort.³⁶ Caste prejudices, fought against officially but in fact deeply rooted, form an additional brake. It is well known that under such conditions it is not possible to expect a vigorous development of the productive forces. Those that profit by their income from land under cultivation — and who already possess privileges of all sorts — have no incentive at all to improve it because they are sure in any case of receiving high rents. This is true for the intermediaries as well. As for the farmers, they are working land that does not belong to them, are in a precarious situation, and also lack any incentive to bring about improvements — and even if they had, they have no margin with which to do so. Furthermore, the high rents cause a lot of capital to be invested in the purchase of land, capital which is thus withdrawn from industrial development.³⁷ Let us limit ourselves here to a few rapid statistical and classificatory data.

Above all, the data on the distribution of property — and need we remind the reader to what degree they are unreliable? — indicate that about 20% of rural families have no land. If there is next considered the category of those owning up to five acres, it is observed that this comprises about three-quarters of rural families, who all together own about one-sixth of the cultivated

area. At the other extreme, the owners of more than 25 acres, who represent only 5% of the total, occupy more than a third of the overall area. A more detailed examination — not placing in the same category those who have only a very little more than 25 acres and those who have more than 100 or even 250 — would give even more significant indications.³⁸

There are three classic systems of property relations, whose roots go deep into past centuries, and particularly to the first period of British domination:

1) The system called ryotwari, in which the property would belong to the land-working peasant, who must pay taxes directly to the state without the intervention of land-owners or other intermediaries. The area occupied by this system is estimated as 36% of the whole.³⁹

2) The system called zemindari, in which the property belongs to a landowner, responsible to the government for the payment of taxes (there exist two types: the fixed-settlement zemindari and the temporary-settlement zemindari, according to whether the tax is set once for all or is on the contrary subject to revision). The landowner does not directly cultivate the land, but rents it to tenants. The area occupied by the fixed-settlement zemindari system is estimated at 35% of the whole.⁴⁰

3) The system called mahalwari, in which the property belongs to village communities, responsible directly to the state for the payment of taxes.

Criticisms have obviously been aimed at the zemindari system, with its picture of the absentee landlord, all the more so in that the situation is aggravated by the introduction, between the owner himself and the land-working peasant, of different intermediaries in the form of tenants and sub-tenants and so on. From the economic point of view, this stratification was rendered possible by the fact that the growing value of the land made a counterweight to the tendency toward the stability of the taxes owed to the state by the landowner.⁴¹

But, as Thorner, among others, has correctly emphasized in his already quoted study, the classic subdivision becomes in the last analysis largely a formal one. In quite numerous cases, in fact, even with the ryotwari system the proprietor did not work his land directly. He preferred to resort to renting it out. Thus, from the

³⁴ Cfr *The Indian Economy*, p 111; *India 1959*, p 215.

³⁵ According to the specialist D K Rangnekar, rent, under its various forms, can vary from 40-50% up to 60% and even 80 of the crop (cfr *Poverty and Capital Development in India*, Oxford, 1958, pp 55-9).

³⁶ Cfr *The Indian Economy*, pp 124-5, and Daniel Thorner, *The Agrarian Prospect in India*, 1956, p 10.

³⁷ Cfr Thorner, op cit, pp 11-13; *The Indian Economy*, pp 125-7.

³⁸ Cfr *India 1959*, pp 195-6.

³⁹ Cfr *The Programme of the Revolutionary Workers' Party of India*, p 15.

⁴⁰ Unfortunately, in the source quoted from, the area covered by the temporary-settlement zemindari system is considered together with the area occupied by the third system (overall percentage, 39%).

⁴¹ Cfr Thorner, op cit, p 8.

social point of view, he tended to identify himself with the zemindari system landowner. This is not to forget, in addition, that very often the usurer enters into the play of forces, a usurer who, as Thorner writes, "without in fact becoming a landowner himself, ends by sharing with the landowners the privilege of finding in agriculture an income without furnishing any agricultural labor."⁴² In the last analysis, the existence of a social stratum that is relatively widespread and obviously very differentiated in its origins and juridical situation — whose common denominator consists in the fact that it finds the source of its profits and privileges in agriculture without participating directly in agricultural production — is one of the essential characteristics of the agrarian "problem" in India.

A more concrete classification might be set up in the following terms. The upper stratum is formed by the maliks or landowners, i e, by those whose agricultural income is derived directly from property rights. In a typical way, these pro-

⁴² Op cit, p 10; retranslated from French.

prietors rent out their land and limit themselves to receiving the income from it; but in many cases they may work it directly by means of rural wage-labor or workers by the day. There can also be found landowners who combine the two forms, renting out part of their property and having the rest worked directly.

A second stratum includes the kisans, who can be described, according to an expression that is current today, as direct cultivators. These are small landowners or share-croppers who obtain from direct agricultural work a sufficient income — under the best of hypotheses — to feed their families. They must often resort to the classic outside work (agricultural or non-agricultural) — at least for some members of their family. It is only in exceptional cases, and at all events for very short periods, that certain kisans hire labor.

The last stratum includes the mazdur, agricultural wage-labor or workers by the day, who work the land of others, and who, if they have a little plot, can derive from it only a secondary source of income.

[To be concluded in our next issue]