

RURAL LIFE AS GOOD AS IN TOWNS

THE other day I found time to take a bus trip to a rural village from Hamhung, the provincial seat. There was a considerable number of passengers. Soon after the bus left, some travellers started conversations, which became livelier and gradually more boastful.

A young man said he had qualified as an agro-engineer last year, a co-operative farmer gave an account of the water supply works now under way in the Undong vallyage and another one chimed in, saying that TV sets were

installed in every house of his village.

An old man from Suhung-ri said that in the past, people had to trudge along a more-than-12-km-long stretch of path with ricebags on their backs for a few cents, but now a bus service has been opened in the neighbouring villages, too, and added that he himself was happy to go by bus to the provincial seat for a visit to his relatives.

The bus soon reached the Red Flag Suhung Co-operative Farm, via the county seat.

MODERN DWELLING HOUSES

On the sunny hillside stood the spectacular building—the “Room for Study of the Revolutionary History of Comrade Kim Il Sung”—which was surrounded by rows of modern dwelling houses and the farm’s club, school, kindergarten, nursery, shops, bath-house, barber shop and other nice-looking service facilities. The village reminded me of a small town and my first impression was that the co-op farm creditably

put into practice the teaching of Premier Kim Il Sung who had said: The most important task confronting us at present for a better livelihood of the people, is to rapidly eliminate the distinctions between the workers and the peasants, in living standards, and between the urban and rural inhabitants in living conditions.”

I had an interview with the Chairman of the Management Board of the co-op farm first.

At the beginning of our conversation, he spoke of the on the spot guidance the

fatherly leader had given to his farm on several occasions.

It was June 16, 1961. The leader came and looked to every facet of the farmers’ life, acquainting himself in detail with the work of the clinic, school education, community supply service and the study and cultural life of the co-op farmers. He gave instructions to build more dwellings, designating the sites and explaining the structure and even paying close attention to the question of drinking water. He taught many other things about how to improve the farmers’ life.

ON FACING PAGE

MAHARASHTRA’S MISERY

FROM CENTRE PAGES

who bought one could sell the hide for Rs. 60, and left the carcass to rot by the roadside.) Fodder sold at Rs. 100 for pindhis, which meant at least Rs. four or five per bullock a day, when his owner could not get even Rs. two at the relief centre!

As for medical relief at the centres, except for the work of voluntary medical teams, the less said about official work, the better. Mrinal Gore quotes a case of Babanbai, whose husband died of starvation and hard work, but she could not get off for fear of losing her wage. She could see him only 12 hours after he had died. Talwalkar also gives instances of how co-workers at the centres, still retaining human considerations, help in such matters, but not the State machinery.

The Chief Minister’s claim in the Assembly to be employing about 25 lakh persons at these centres, with all their shortcomings, is not true. (Even as it is, this means a job for one in every ten needing them and for one in every four employable persons.) For, most workers, as has been noted by all reporters, have to wait from one to six weeks or more to get a new job once one is over. At any one time, therefore, it

looks reasonable to put the figure at half that stated by Sri Naik. Even “if all planned relief works were sanctioned, it will give employment to 3.6 million. What of the rest 22 million?”

Such is the picture of the misery and destitution and coupled with it of the rulers’ callousness and inefficiency. If things are not worse, the reason is the people will not have it.

As Comrade Godavari Parulekar noted in her tour of the Nasik areas, if effective steps are not taken, there will be gheraos. People are ready to go to jails for it, she said. M. Akbar (*Illustrated Weekly*) was told by a senior Sub-Divisional Officer: “We do not know what will happen to us if things get worse. There is already morcha every day. If it gets worse, they may not remain with peaceful demonstration.”

PREPARATIONS FOR GENERAL STRIKE

The Left political parties and trade unions have been fighting against this Governmental callousness and it should not be long before the entire working class in Maharashtra is swung into a one-day general strike. The struggle began when on October 6, an Anti-Price-Rise and Famine Relief Conference was organised by the TU Co-ordination

Committee formed by CITU, AITUC, HMS, HMP, UTUC, Sarva Shramik Sangh (SSS) and BMS. It passed a resolution on the famine holding the State Government responsible for it and called for a satyagraha on October 13 to focus public attention on it. About 8000 workers participated in the demonstration in Bombay alone, of whom over 1250 courted arrest for breaking the ban.

The State Government called a meeting of T.U. leaders seeking their co-operation for swelling the Chief Minister’s Famine Relief Fund, but it ended in a walk-out by the representatives of the CITU, AITUC, HMP, UTUC, because the Chief Minister refused at the outset to apologise, as demanded by the T.U. leaders, for the brutal police firing at Islampur shortly before that. Hungry kisans had taken out a morcha at the relief centres and the police fired on them killing four youths belonging to the Peasants’ and Workers’ Party. These T.U.s thereupon refused to co-operate with the Government and decided instead to collect their own fund of Rs. 25 lakhs to be disbursed through the all-Party Famine Relief Committee at Poona.

But more than fund collection, the Co-ordina-

tion Committee decided to call a Statewide general strike against the Government’s policies which allowed prices to rise skyhigh in cities and allowed the poor peasants to die of starvation. It was planned for February, but the HMS and AITUC despite a previous decision, backed out of it, leaving the CITU, HMP, UTUC and SSS with no alternative but to go ahead with the decision. They now called for the strike by February end and swung into preparations for it. A joint tour of the leaders of CITU, HMP and SSS was organised to cover the industrial centres of the State, such as Poona, Kolhapur, Sangli, Ichalkaranji, etc. The highly encouraging response there was accompanied by a mass distribution in Bombay and elsewhere of 50,000 leaflets which nailed down the Congress rulers’ anti-peasant policies as being responsible for the famine. The handbill called on workers to be ready for the strike. Conventions of workers in the textile industry and middle class employees also were organised in preparation.

Seeing the growing mood of the workers, the AITUC leadership now decided to join the call, but in view of the municipal elections suggested a change in the strike date. Meanwhile, a conference of workers wor-

king at the relief centres is being called for March 4 by the Famine Relief Committee of Poona; prior to this, different such conferences at lower levels have already been held, some of which as at Dahiwadi in Satara district were very well attended.

On behalf of the Left parties, tours have been organised to expose the malpractices at the relief centres and to suggest immediate and effective remedial measures. The reports appearing in the Press of these tours have further exposed the anti-people policies of the Congress rulers. On behalf of the CPI (M), Comrade Godavari Parulekar toured Nasik district and also addressed conventions of famine relief centre workers at Sangli, Ichalkaranji, Hatkanangale, Phaltan, etc.

These conferences and the decision of the AITUC to join the proposed strike have led to a slight postponement of the strike date, to some day in March. The mounting bitterness of the working class against the ever-rising prices, and the growing hardships and miseries of their peasant brothers because of the famine, will surely see the strike an outstanding demonstration of working class solidarity with the kisans.