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PREFACE.

After the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement, there was a general concensus of opinion among the Congress workers of Maharashtra that it was urgently desirable to widen our organisation and link it organically with the problems and needs of the peasant masses. With a view to help a more correct appraisement of the rural situation, the Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee appointed the Peasant Inquiry Committee on 14th July, 1935. The Committee consisted of :—

Sjt. A. S. Patwardhan, Ahmednagar.
Sjt. R. K. Khadilkar, (Convener) Poona.
Sjt. Mohanlal Dantwala, Dhulia.
Sjt. V. P. Limaye, Poona.
Sjt. K. M. Jedhe, M.L.A., Poona.
Sjt. N. V. Gadgil, M.L.A., Poona.

The scope of the inquiry was indicated in the following manner :

“The Committee should study the economic conditions of the various strata of peasantry, the richer peasant, owner-cultivator, and sections of the poorer peasantry—the various types of tenants and landless labourers—with a view to understand their immediate needs as producers of India’s food and fodder. The Committee should also survey certain specific problems like indebtedness, land-revenue, rent, forest and irrigation grievances etc., and outline a programme of immediate demands on the basis of which peasant organisations may be stimulated all over the province.”

The Resolution of the Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee gave the following terms of reference :—

The Committee is to mainly inquire into :—

- (1) The present revenue system and its effects,
- ✓(2) The agricultural indebtedness, how to reduce it, and how to provide credit facilities to the peasant,
- (3) Co-operative movement,
- ✓(4) Land-mortgage Banks and their immediate results,

- (5) Forest grievances and how to remove them,
- (6) Difficulties faced by Bagaitdars,
- (7) Khoti system,
- (8) The condition of the landless agricultural labour,
- (9) The basis-of Peasants' Organisations in Maharashtra,
- (10) Subsidiary industries and possibilities of their development, and
- (11) Other allied grievances.

The Committee first collected official and statistical data available from the Government Reports and then drew up a questionnaire which was sent to five or six normal villages from each district. But it was considered necessary not to treat the districts as such, as units, but to divide the field of inquiry into definitely homogeneous zones. Thus we had a cotton zone, a rice zone, a dry food-crop zone and well or canal-irrigated money-crop zone. In each of these zones, the Committee tried to get a series of cross-sections of the peasantry, the well-to-do class, the marginal-middle-peasant, and the impoverished mass of lower peasantry, both tenants and labourers. It is in this fashion that the problem was analysed. With a view to gain a realistic touch with the various problems, the Committee divided the area and toured almost every district to study at first hand four or five villages of the normal type. This personal contact has given to the Committee's efforts a much greater interest. It was our object to test theories by means of facts, and understand facts in a sort of synthesis, which turns the particular into the general.

We were specially interested in understanding two main problems at every place we visited. We wanted to estimate the average cost of production, and the average gross produce and its value at current prices. The one question we set ourselves to answer was, whether the "two ends could meet", was there a surplus in the normal years and how many percent of the cultivators had a surplus? That was a rough and ready test of solvency and stability. Such an inquiry should have gained much in its value, if it had the co-operation of the Government; if it had access to all the information that the State alone can possess. In the absence of such a data, much of our information—the facts and figures—cannot, strictly speaking, be called statistics. But we

are confident that they are, broadly speaking, correct. However, we shall always be glad if a new set of facts are presented to us. We shall be only too happy to revise our analysis in the light of such facts.

It would have been impossible for us to do any justice to our responsibilities, were it not for the fact that in every district we were fortunate in getting the willing co-operation of Congress workers who have won the confidence of the peasantry by their selfless service of the peasant masses. We are very glad to tender our hearty thanks to all these friends in every district.

Besides these Congress workers, the Committee had the valuable assistance, advice and co-operation of Principal D. R. Gadgil, Director of the Gokhale Institute of Economics and Politics, Poona, at every stage of inquiry. And while we should like to make it clear that he is in no way committed to the opinions expressed by us, we gratefully acknowledge all the valuable guidance and encouragement we have always received from him.

We must confess that in submitting this report we are conscious of a deep sense of the limitations of our performance. The inadequacy of our data has been indeed a serious handicap. However, we hope that Congress and peasant workers in the village-areas would try to understand at first hand the specific economic problems affecting the peasant's life as a producer of wealth; and we look forward to them to take up intensive surveys over very small areas to complete the work we have begun.
