

FOOD

**in BOMBAY
PROVINCE**

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First Edition, June-July 1944

C O N T E N T S

I. HERALDS OF FAMINE IN BOMBAY	3
II. GOVERNMENT PLANS PROCUREMENT	9
III. PATRIOTS AND THE FOOD CRISIS	..	..	18
IV. THE WAY OUT	..	..	34

TWELVE ANNAS.

FOOD IN BOMBAY

The province of Bombay is on the brink of a major disaster. The food situation has deteriorated rapidly, and, today, in the rural areas of Bombay Presidency, in the villages and deficit districts of Maharashtra, appear all the signs that herald a big and calamitous famine. Extortionate prices beyond the means of the rural poor, the agricultural labourer and the small peasants; scarcity of grain immediately after the harvest, black-market operations and a growing collapse of distribution in the rural areas, Government's inability to open sufficient shops forcing people to buy at exorbitant black-market prices or go without food—such is the situation that is rapidly becoming general and threatens to overtake the whole province. It is said that many villages have stocks to enable them to carry on for a month or six weeks; and that after this period, unless provision is made, one-third at least, of the village population must starve bit by bit. While Government is extremely reticent about the seriousness of the food situation, sufficient indications are available to show that the crisis might burst either this month or the next and certainly before the Kharif crop is harvested.

Popular ranks seem to be unaware of this grave situation; people shrug their shoulders; responsible citizens admit that the situation is bad; but none seems to realise that death stares the province in the face and unless people themselves move, Bombay's rural population must face the same fate as Bengal's.

F A C T S

India's aggregate production of seven principal grains—Wheat, Rice, Bajra, Gram, Jowar, Barley and Maize—has varied from 49 million tons to 55 million tons. This estimate does not refer to the whole of India. Nearly 44 per cent of the area under Indian States is not included in it. Such an important State as Kashmir, covering nearly 2 million acres, does not report any production figures. Besides, permanently

settled areas, lands held on privilege, unsurveyed areas, give only rough estimates ; there is no information whatsoever of the land under food grains in the tribal areas of the N.W.F.P. and British Baluchistan (Gregory Committee's Report p. 9).

In spite, therefore, of the exaggerated estimates of official statistics the above figures can be taken as an *under-estimate*. In any case, though people habitually starved in pre-war years, India's production has been sufficient to prevent famine or deaths from lack of food.

India supplemented her resources by imports from Burma which, on an average, amounted to $1\frac{1}{2}$ million tons. This comes to 3 per cent of our huge production ; one and a half million tons of rice means food for 9 millions at the rate of 1 lb. per head per day, i.e., the annual requirements of 2 per cent of our population.

The stoppage of these imports, while they no doubt added to our difficulties, need not have caused a single death nor the general scarcity that obtains in India. Shortage of 2 to 3 per cent of our production can be easily met by cutting down unequal distribution and none need have starved.

The demands of the army are said to have been responsible for our misfortunes. No doubt, India living on the margin, will find every additional demand a grievous burden if no step is taken to change old ways of unequal distribution. But the demand of the army, examined by itself is 650,000 tons, of which quite a good part is consumed by the sons of the soil themselves. 650,000 tons in a total production of 50 million is a small quantity ; it comes to 1 and $\frac{1}{3}$ per cent of our production. The loss of imports from Burma together with the army demand, will amount to a net loss of *less than 4 per cent*, if we make allowance for the fact that the army contains a good number of Indians. If we don't make allowance for this, the net loss will be slightly more than 4 per cent—a loss which can be easily remedied by reorganising civilian distribution, by asking the rich to stop their luxuries so that all get enough to eat ; so that at least the pre-war position, when none died due to famine, is restored.

A vast country like India must primarily depend on its own resources. India can never be fed by imports from abroad. They, at best, can supplement her resources provided they are properly mobilised. We find the new factors have not brought about such a shortage, that vast numbers must die unless imports are brought in. At the same time we see that unless

India meets the new pressure by organising distribution, by equalising it, the shortages created by the war must spread famine conditions and lead to endless suffering. The old ways of free marketing, money being the sole measure of how much each was to get, must change if people are to be saved from starvation. If this is not done, we see what follows: the Bengal famine with its three-and-a-half million deaths.

India, living on the margin, therefore, can save herself if every province and village parts with all surplus grain to make the distribution as even and equal as possible. The major part of India's needs must come from her own resources, she cannot look to foreign imports to satisfy them. These latter at best will relieve the situation when India's resources are already mobilised.

At the same time it cannot be denied that the loss of Burmese imports and the additional demands of the army have strained our resources. Government of India's failure to fill in the gap by additional imports can only be described as criminal incompetence. The Gregory Committee appointed by the Government of India itself, recommended net imports of 1½ million tons to meet the current shortage and enable Government to control stocks and prices with the aid of a food reserve. All that the Government of India have been able to achieve since September last is to import 400,000 tons, or one-fourth the quantity deemed necessary by the Committee. Incompetence cannot go further.

I. HERALDS OF FAMINE IN BOMBAY

The situation in Bombay is to be understood in the light of these facts. The surplus provinces of C.P., U.P., Punjab and Sind have to bear the responsibility of making good the deficit in other provinces. Their resources are not infinite; they can feed other provinces only in so far as these provinces fully control all their grain resources for equal distribution.

No one knows how much these provinces can afford to export this year. Recent unseasonal rains have severely damaged crops in some of them and made it extremely problematical whether they will fulfil their promised quota of export.

The province of Bombay itself is a deficit province. According to Government figures the deficit worked out at nearly 15 per cent, i.e., Bombay normally imported food grains to the extent of nearly 15 per cent of the total consumption of the

province (Mr. Knight, Adviser, at Press Conference held in Bombay on 1-3-44). In actual quantity the deficit is estimated by the Adviser at 600,000 tons *i.e.*, a year's food for more than 3½ million people at the rate of 1 lb. per head. The Gregory Committee estimated the imports, and thus the deficit to be nearly 700,000 tons, that is, annual food requirements of more than 4 million people, or 20 per cent of the population. Government sources indicate that this year the imports allowed by the Government of India from other provinces may not be more than 400,000 tons and there might be still further reduction due to the recent damage of crops.

This means a reduction of 200,000 to 300,000 tons—equal to the annual requirements of 13 to 18 lakhs of people *i.e.*, 6 to 9 per cent of the population. *It is an additional heavy burden on the resources of the province. To deprive the province of the food requirements of 6 to 9 per cent of its population cannot be justified on any ground except the bankruptcy of the Central Government. It has rendered Bombay's food position extremely serious and made the task of procurement and equal distribution extremely difficult. The additional shortage created by it intensifies hoarding and black-marketing and endangers procurement. There can, therefore, be no two opinions on this question. In fairness to Bombay and its people the Central Government must be compelled to restore Bombay's full quota.*

PRECARIOUS MARGIN

According to the official statement submitted to the Bombay Provincial Rural Development Board, the actual outturn of all food crops in 1941-1942 (including pulses etc.) was only 3,200,000 tons. In the next year it was 3,600,000 tons; in 1943-44 it was expected to be 3,800,000 tons. Deducting pulses to the total quantity of cereals available will be between 32 to 33 lakh tons. *Allowing ten per cent of the production for seed, Bombay's production of cereals available for consumption is somewhere between 2,900,000 to 3,000,000 tons only.*

If we add the expected imports of 4 lakh tons, the total quantity of cereals available for consumption comes to 33 to 34 lakh tons. *At the rate of 1 lb. per head, this quantity will just be enough to feed a population of 208 to 209 lakhs. Bombay's population today will be somewhere between 218 to 220 lakhs, if a 5 per cent increase is assumed since the last census.*

It means that Bombay is living on such a narrow margin that it cannot afford a full 1 lb. ration per head all the year round even if every man is honest enough to take only an equal share and none hoards for the sake of profits.

This does not, however, mean that the majority of the people must starve; no. Twenty-five per cent. of the population consists of children who consume either no cereals or only half the quantity. To that extent a larger share, i.e., at least the minimum ration of one lb. can be released for adults. But *it decisively means that unless every available surplus grain of cereals is properly distributed, unless rich and poor alike are given an equal minimum share, unless all the available stocks are centrally controlled and distributed, thousands must starve and even die.*

The margin is so narrow that the old way of distribution under which each can buy according to the length of his purse will spell disaster for the majority of our people. It is so narrow that unless all withholding of grain from the market is effectively stopped, unless the black-market is destroyed, unless profiteering is completely eliminated, tens of thousands must starve as they did in Bengal,—with grain lying in the godowns of the hoarders

The gravity is enhanced by the fact that this year there is greater temptation to hoard and withhold grain from the market. Last year it was the trader-hoarder who got hold of the grain and hoarded it. But now the better-off peasant himself threatens to do it. He has seen how prices go on soaring and reach their peak towards the end of the year. Last year and the year before he saw the trader minting money with the grain sold by him at harvest time. Now that he is convinced that prices will rise—why throw all the grain on the market, why not wait for still higher prices and make a little money—that is how he is arguing. Besides, the prevalent high prices enable him to meet his revenue demand by selling a very small part of his surplus—smaller than usual—and withhold the rest from the market.

The high prices of the past three years, the profits piled up by the traders, and the fact that for meeting revenue needs he has to sell only a small surplus—are factors which offer irresistible temptation to the middle and rich farmer not to sell all his surplus in the market... This, of course, is the most alarming aspect of the situation... Unless, therefore, the temptation is removed by patriotic persuasion and legal pressure

wherever necessary, the existing shortage will be converted into famine.

Control of stocks and distribution, therefore, assume the highest importance in the present situation. Let us all remember Bengal. In Bengal 3.5 millions died and many more millions came very near death, not because the prevalent shortage of food made it inevitable, but because on the basis of this shortage there came into existence price-racketeering and hoarding which made equal distribution impossible, and converted the shortage into the most gruesome famine.

According to the Gregory Committee, the shortage in Bengal roughly represented 7 weeks' normal requirements of rice in Bengal. This is equivalent to a deficit of 14 to 15 per cent which, of course, is a big deficit. Even this by itself need not have led to the harrowing tale of sufferings or caused a single death, for under equal distribution this would have meant that Bengal's population—rich and poor alike—would have had to go on half rations for two days in the week. This, at worst, would have led to severe privations but not to deaths.

Bombay is faced with the same necessity of procuring all surplus stocks for equal and effective distribution. All other doors are barred to her. She either does this or lets loose death on the poorer sections of our people.

No wonder then that Mr. Knight, Adviser to the Governor of Bombay, was compelled to admit on March 1st at a Press Conference: "The food situation in Bombay Province is undoubtedly a grave one and needs careful handling."

COMING EVENTS

Already throughout the province, especially in Maharashtra, evidence of widespread starvation is accumulating. For days the poorer sections are going without food, not because there is no food in the village but because it has to be purchased at black-market prices which are beyond their capacity. Taking advantage of the shortage the profiteer has already got busy to sow death and famine among the people. In quite a number of villages peasants have already eaten the stock of seeds so that nothing is left for sowing in the next season. Privations are common and starvation is forcing people—especially the landless and small peasants—to leave the villages. Eighteen months after, history is repeating itself and all the phenomena which heralded the big famine of Bengal obtain

today in the villages of Maharashtra. Here are a few facts :

Explaining the Bill on Grow More Food, Mr. Knight stated: "Only 5 or 6 districts of the province are self-sufficient in the matter of food. The rest are deficit and have to depend largely on outside help."

If no outside help were given to East Khandesh, it will accord only $2\frac{2}{3}$ of a lb. per head ; Ratnagiri's production will give only $1\frac{1}{3}$ lb. per head.

In the surplus district of Thana, the agricultural labourer and the poor peasant who to-day have to buy their food, are no longer in a position to get it. They used to live on one of the most inferior kinds of cereals called *Nagli*. The pre-war price of *Nagli* was 2 annas per *paylee*. The present price is Rs. 1 per *paylee*, eight times the pre-war price. There is no control over *Nagli* and the hoarders have whisked away the entire stocks, putting the rural poor at their mercy. How many of the labourers whose wages have not increased by more than 50 per cent can afford to pay eight times the former price ?

Typical is the instance of one of the villages in Satara district. In this village quite a number of people are living on carrots, sweet potatoes, etc ; only 20 to 25 per cent get grain from the Government shop and that too at the rate of $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. per head.

In the Deogarh taluka of Ratnagiri district things are already bordering on famine. Here is what Sjt. Parulekar, M.L.A., writes from a personal investigation of the three Talukas of Deogarh, Malwon and Vengurla :

"In villages which are deficit in production of food grains and have no ration shops, the agricultural labourers and the rural poor are starving. Ashiya is one of such several villages. It has a population of 600. 55 per cent of the inhabitants of this village have been living on either groundnut or jack-fruit during the last fortnight. I met one of the sturdiest of them who could once easily walk 20 miles a days but who could not now walk even a short distance with steady steps.

"Thirty-five per cent of the inhabitants procure their food from the black-market. Ten per cent of them have stocks which are just enough to last a couple of months only. There are 119 villages in Deogarh taluka ; in more than 50 of them similar conditions prevail.

"The poorer sections are starving even in villages which have a surplus production but no ration shops. The starving

population constitutes at least 18 per cent of the total. Not that there is no grain in the villages, but the poor starve because all the stocks are in the hands of the black-marketeers and they have no money to pay the black-market prices.

"There is no village in Vengurla, Malwon and Deogarh where there is no black-market. It exists in deficit as well as surplus villages, in villages where there are ration shops and also where there are none. It flourishes most in Deogarh taluka where scarcity of food is most acute.

"In the district of Ratnagiri the retail price of rice during 1940-41 was 7.25 seers per rupee.

"To-day the control price is Rs. 0-15-9 per *paylee* (4 seers) or twice the 1940-41 price.

"While the black-market price in Vengurla, Malwon and Deogarh is $1\frac{1}{2}$ seers per rupee, which is five times the price of 1940-41 and $2\frac{1}{2}$ times that of the control price."

It means rice sells in the black-market at Rs. 27 per maund; in many places it sells at Rs. 30 to 32—a price which obtained in Bengal in some of the worst days of the famine.

Is it possible for any section of the poorer strata to survive in these conditions? It means a family of three adults must spend one rupee per day on rice alone...How many families can afford to do that? In plain language it means that families of agricultural labourers and small peasants must starve for three out of the seven days of the week.

Selfishness does not end here; nor do the woes of the people. The poorer sections starve even when the village possesses a ration shop; for these shops are managed by the profiteering gentry who regularly send a large quantity of the grain to the black-market. In many places, the stocks supplied to the ration shops are enough to feed those who have no grain stocks of their own. Yet the small peasants and labourers starve because even well-off people buy from ration shops and sell their own grain in the black-market. This reduces the quantity per head secured through the Government shop; for instance, instead of 1 lb. the needy get only $2\frac{1}{3}$ of a lb.—all because there are no ration cards and people with grain are not prevented from buying in Government shops.

Between black-marketeers, selfish persons, corrupt officials and traders, the smaller men are getting crushed.

Sjt. Bhogle, President of the Bombay Girni Kamgar Union who toured 45 villages of Deogarh Taluka corroborates the fact of growing starvation. In many villages from 30 to 70 per cent

of the people are starving. Quite a number of small peasants have consumed their seed stocks so that they have nothing to sow when the monsoon comes. Particularly affected are the Mahars, weavers, Muslims and agricultural labourers.

A Mahar leader of a village told Sjt. Bhogle that he was doubtful if any Mahar in the village would survive after the next few months. Peasant women of a village told him that they had never witnessed such bad conditions before and they were full of anxiety about their children and themselves. A well-off gentleman with whom Sjt. Bhogle put up in one of the villages told him that he had to pay Rs. 10 for 9 seers of rice and that in the last four months he had to spend Rs. 230 on grain alone for a family of four persons.

The distress extends to other districts as well. A report in the *Times of India* dated 2-2-44 stated that a resolution passed at a joint meeting of Hindus and Mussalmans of Jamner (East Khandesh) "viewed with great concern and anxiety the prevailing food situation in the Taluka and felt that if no action was taken by the Government many people would have to migrate as already a condition of starvation had arisen, especially among the poor and labouring classes. If Government did not take action a situation similar to that in Bengal might arise in the Taluka."

All the heralds of famine are here. Shortage followed by black-marketing, rocketing prices, hoarding and collapse of distribution; privations and starvation among the poorer sections; eating of seeds by the small peasant—in short slow and steady preparation for death for agricultural labourers who may number between 40 to 50 lakhs, small peasants and the rural lower middle class.

II. GOVERNMENT PLANS PROCUREMENT

Recognising the gravity of the situation, though it concealed it from the people, the Government of Bombay announced in October last its procurement plan for the Kharif crop. The plan itself was half-hearted and did not go out to meet the full needs of the situation. It did not attempt to control or take possession of all surplus stocks. It only aimed at securing a certain percentage of the crop to enable the Government to control the market. Nonetheless, it was an attempt to control stocks and organise distribution.

The plan aimed at securing 25 per cent of the rice and 10

per cent of the millet crops—which meant quite a good percentage of the marketable surplus.

Cultivators were forbidden to sell to private traders. Attractive prices were offered. For instance in the districts of Kolaba and Thana the price offered for paddy was from Rs. 5 to 7 per maund. In the same districts one maund of paddy would have fetched Rs. 2-8-0 to 3 in 1940-41, i.e., prices offered were two to two and half times the 1940-41 prices.

Prices offered for Jowar and Bajra in the district of Bijapur also bore the same proportion to 1940-41 prices.

In December 1943 price offered	Harvest Time 1940-41
for Bajra 7 seers } per	for Jowar 17.63 seers } per
for Jowar 6½ seers } rupee	for Bajra 15.19 seers } rupee.

In the district of Nagar prices offered were :

Jowar	.....	Rs. 6-12-0	per maund
Bajri	.....	„ 8- 0-0	„ „
Rice	.....	„ 11- 0-0	„ „
Wheat	.....	„ 12- 8-0	„ „

Prices last year were : Jowar Rs. 5-8-0 to Rs. 6-0-0 per maund ; Bajri Rs. 4-8-0 to Rs. 7-8-0 per maund.

Prices in 1940-41 were :

Jowar 18 seers per rupee, i.e., Rs. 2-4-0 per maund.
 Bajri 12 seers per rupee, i.e., Rs. 3-5-0 per maund.
 Wheat 8.75 seers per rupee, i.e., Rs. 4-8-0 per maund.
 Rice 7.38 seers per rupee, i.e., Rs. 5-8-0 per maund.

Similar prices were offered in the other districts as well. None could say that the prices were not fair. The small peasant, though he grumbled at the prices he had to pay for industrial goods, readily sold his crop at Government prices ; there are many instances where though Government's buying operations started late, the small peasant held on and would not sell to the trader. The trader himself dared not offer higher prices.

But the middle and rich farmers who controlled all surplus would not sell. There was to be no compulsion under the plan except that the cultivators could not sell to private traders. There was no obligation that they must part with a certain quantity of grain to the Government ; if, however, they decided to sell, they had to sell to the Government. There was no

legal compulsion against keeping all the surplus stock in their own hands. These sections, therefore, naturally took advantage of it. They could afford to wait and withhold their grain till prices rose still further. And they did begin withholding instead of bringing it to the market as usual. The Government on its part relied only on its fair and attractive prices, which were sufficient to make the small peasant part with his stocks, but did not satisfy the desire to profit of the rest. Government thought that now that it had offered prices which no trader would offer at harvest time, stocks would come running to Government godowns. It thought it had outbidded and defeated the trader. And the trader was really paralysed. But Government counted without the better-off peasant. He had seen that it paid if you held your stocks till the end of the year, if you released them bit by bit, as and when prices rose. And he was determined not to lose this opportunity this year.

The Government plan failed mainly because it would not invite the co-operation of the people and because its corrupt officials allowed the rich to go scot-free and attempted to compel the poorer peasants to part with excessive quantities of grain. Government admitted its failure in the following words: "*The scheme has met with a certain amount of success. But on the whole the quantity bought has fallen short of what was aimed at. Much depended on the willing co-operation of the big landlord and the large cultivator who controlled the bulk of the produce. Broadly speaking this co-operation has not been forthcoming. There has been a tendency to pass an undue share of the burden to the smaller landholder or tenant. Petty officials in villages could not always be refrained from using pressure where it could without much difficulty be exerted.*" (Bombay Information Bulletin—4th March).

The co-operation of the middle peasant would have come and the landlord would have followed suit if officials had thought of securing the co-operation of public organisations. The fear of the people brought about the failure of the plan. There is no doubt that in many cases official estimates of production were exaggerated. However, the fact stands out that all the marketable surplus did not come in the market and that the Government got very little. No one knows the actual quantity secured by the Government, but it must have been far short of its proclaimed target figures.

SECOND PROCUREMENT PLAN

The failure of the first plan created a serious situation. It was obvious that unless drastic measures were taken neither the villages nor towns could be safeguarded against starvation ; that hoarding would convert the prevailing shortage into a famine.

The Bombay Government saw that the failure of its voluntary scheme had landed the province into a dangerous situation. To do away with hoarding and get possession of large stocks the authorities announced a new scheme of levy for the Rabi crop. They, of course, refused to learn from their mistakes and did not alter their outlook towards people's co-operation and people's organisations. They relied on their power of compulsion, on the all-powerful bureaucracy though they prattled now and then about inviting people's co-operation.

The object of the new scheme was to secure sufficient stocks so that the populations of towns and villages alike could be ensured a minimum quantity of cereals per head. The aim was to introduce rationing in the rural areas for those who have to buy their grain and also in the 67 towns of the Presidency.

The new plan made one fundamental departure from the old one, it introduced the principle of a compulsory levy. It retained Government monopoly of purchase of cereals.

27½ maunds are left with the producer to satisfy the needs of his family. Allowing for seeds etc., the quantity is calculated to be sufficient to maintain a family of 5 adults at the rate of 1 lb. of cereals per day. Producers who produce below 27½ maunds or just that quantity are not liable to any levy.

Above 27½ maunds a graded scale is fixed. The bigger the holding the higher the percentage of yield that has to be given to the Government.

In practice the levy, instead of being related to individual yields is graded in relation to assessment. This is done by taking into consideration the proportion of the area under food-grains to the assessed area in a taluka, the differences in the quality of the soil and rates of assessment in different settlement groups. In this way an attempt is made to relate the levy to the yield of the soil. It is thus possible to derive the particular figure of assessment, which in the settlement group corresponds in yield to the normal requirements of a

cultivating family. These requirements, it has been estimated, amount to 27.5 maunds. All assessments at or below the figure corresponding to an outturn of 27.5 maunds are exempted altogether from the levy. On higher assessments the levy will be a percentage increasing with the assessment. At the same time the higher the assessment the larger is the quantity left with the cultivators.

The levy, as will be seen, does not take away the entire surplus from any one. On the other hand in the higher categories an increasingly large amount of surplus is left.

This surplus left after paying the levy the holder may not sell, but may either consume or hoard. If he wants to sell it, however, he must sell to the Government only.

How the scale is graded according to assessment can be seen from the following. For settlement No. 1 Group of Bijapur Taluka of Bijapur District the scheme begins as follows :

Where the total amount of assessment is :

	Amount of levy in paylee (1 paylee = 4 seers)
Rs. 10 and under Rs. 11	.. .. 6
Rs. 11 " " Rs. 12	.. .. 15
Rs. 12 " " Rs. 13	.. .. 29
Rs. 13 " " Rs. 14	.. .. 39
and so on	

The second procurement plan therefore consists of :

(1) Compulsory sale of cereals by all cultivators who produce above 27½ maunds to the Government in accordance with the levy.

(2) A graded levy which goes on increasing with the assessment.

(3) The levy does not absorb the entire surplus but leaves big surpluses in the hands of the rich peasants, and considerable quantities in the hands of middle peasants.

(4) Government monopoly of purchase and sale of cereals.

(5) Government's responsibility to organise distribution in rural areas and towns by opening shops.

THE PLAN IN OPERATION

On the success of this plan which was announced in March, depend the lives of thousands of inhabitants of the province. Either the entire surplus comes in the hands of the Government and equal distribution is organised, or the

poorer sections in the villages and towns must starve and even die.

How did the Government proceed to implement this plan when so much depended on it? How far has it succeeded? How far have the people discharged their responsibility towards their kith and kin?

The plan was announced in March. Purchases are going on even now. But the news trickling from official circles clearly indicates that Government themselves consider that the four months between July and October will be the most critical for the province. The fear is often expressed that Bombay might go the Bengal way. It is obvious that purchases have not been satisfactory and Government is unable to meet the requirements of organised distribution.

No one knows the actual quantity purchased by the Government. But it will be a miracle if the Government have succeeded in purchasing more than 10 to 12 per cent of the total crop of cereals. They seem to be far from reaching even their old objective announced in the first plan—of securing 25 per cent of the rice crop. Much less have they secured the total surplus in the province. In fact in official circles it will be considered a creditable achievement if Government manage to purchase more than 4 lakh tons of cereals, which is less than 12 per cent of the total produce of cereals.

What are Government's responsibilities? It has undertaken to feed non-producers in the villages, and producers who do not produce enough to meet their own needs, and also the town population. Excluding, therefore, the producers of food who are self-sufficient, there will be not less than 10 millions to be fed through organised procurement and rationing. This figure of 10 millions itself is an under-estimate.

Taking every favourable factor into consideration, there seems no reason to doubt that Government stocks—actual and prospective—must be short at least by 15 per cent. The actual stocks may not be more than 60 per cent of the requirements of the next four months.

That the situation is so serious and grave can be judged from Government's failure to introduce rationing in towns and villages, and the fantastically low quantities sold per head in village shops.

Out of the 67 towns listed for rationing, with a total population of nearly two millions, hardly half the number had seen rationing by June. Its introduction has been re-

peatedly postponed in several places and even in district towns like Jalgaon.

The opening of shops in rural areas is proceeding at a snail's pace. In some districts and localities there are hardly any shops. Notorious is the case of the Panch Mahals and Broach. In others the total number of shops is not only inadequate but often constitutes a scandal. In certain villages of the Satara District people have to travel a distance of six to seven miles to reach the grain-shop and have often to return without getting any grain.

That this failure is mostly due to failure to possess adequate stocks is evident from the starvation rations allowed in several places.

In some villages of Satara people can buy only $4\frac{1}{2}$ seers every fortnight. It works out $3\frac{3}{5}$ of a lb. per day per head instead of the 1 lb. minimum recommended by the Gregory Committee.

At Yawal and Raver in the East Khandesh District at first the ration fixed was 3 seers per week; later on it was 2 seers and is now 1 seer or 2 lbs. per week. In Pachora taluk at one place it is only 1 lb. per week. In the non-rationed areas of Poona only $2\frac{2}{7}$ lbs. was allowed per day per adult, i.e. 2 lbs. per week.

No human being can subsist on these rations for long. $2\frac{2}{7}$ lb. per week compares unfavourably even with the ration permitted to Bengal destitutes in the worst days of famine. And yet these starvation rations are legalised today and are becoming more and more common in the rural areas of Bombay.

The reason, of course, is that the Government has failed to secure adequate stocks. This is frankly admitted by lower officials who often say that Government's rations are only supplementary and the people must buy the major portion of their requirements from the black market.

This is how Government's plan of procuring grain for the villages has succeeded.

The towns are in no better position. It is becoming more and more questionable whether persons doing heavy work in these towns will get any extra ration. No town perhaps will get the ration of 1 lb. per head; 25 lbs. per month, which means $5\frac{5}{6}$ lb. per day, will be the prescribed quantity. It is to be seen whether even this quantity is made available in all towns.

Officially the Government seem to have given up all hope of being able to give 1 lb. per head for the non-producing rural populations; they are making their plans on the basis of $3\frac{1}{4}$ lb. per head; a quantity totally insufficient to feed any strong and healthy man. In actual reality they are not able to give even $3\frac{1}{4}$ lb. regularly; they are forcing people to live on $2\frac{1}{7}$ lb., i.e., 2 ounces a day—the ration of starvation and death.

CRIMINAL SHORTSIGHTEDNESS

Why this state of affairs endangering the lives of thousands? Because once more the Government refused to accept people's co-operation and attempted to solve the major problem by keeping the big political organisations at an arm's length. Typical is the instance from Satara. A noted Congress leader was elected by the Local Municipality to serve on the District Price Advisory Committee. He had publicly stated several times that the food question had to be jointly solved. Yet the Collector of Satara would not invite him to attend the meeting of the Price Advisory Committee. In any other country such behaviour on the part of the local official would have meant instantaneous reprimand. But in this country the higher authorities don't seem to care.

This reliance on the local officials, on the bureaucratic machinery, is spelling disaster. In at least one instance the local officials supplied wrong information to the Government to the effect that their districts were deficit ones. In reality their districts were surplus ones. But why bother to collect additional quota and take all the trouble for it? It was this mercenary outlook which led them to deliberately mislead the Government. Needless to say when the Government fixed a lower quota for them they were able to fulfil it within a fortnight. However they went on telling the Government that quotas were being collected gradually and spread the figures over a number of weeks.

Yet another instance is that of a local official of Dhaduka Taluka in Kaira district. When some members of the Communist Party went to Dhaduka to persuade the peasants to sell all surplus grain to the Government, they were shocked to find that there was plenty of wheat which the cultivators were willing to sell, but the local *mamlatdar* wouldn't make any arrangements to buy it. The *mamlatdar* refused to open

more than four purchasing centres though there was a demand for more. The producers who brought the grain to sell had to wait interminably at the purchasing centre and the carts of those who offered bribes were weighed first. Many bags were lying at the station soaked through with heavy rain. Nothing was done to remove these bags though it had been raining for some days.

Officials who are guilty of such criminal negligence should be publicly tried as saboteurs of the food plan. But the Government would rather rely on them than have people's co-operation on any terms.

As regards corruption, excessive levies, and unthinking application of Government orders, there have been many complaints. In the beginning the village officials often gave no receipt to the peasant for the grain purchased, nor, of course, cash. The agents appointed to purchase rice delivered only half their total purchases to the Government, especially in the district of Thana. With the connivance of officials there has now developed a regular trade from Shahapur in Thana District to Nasik and Nagar, though all movement of grain is forbidden. The grain is sent in military lorries whose drivers are heavily bribed. In Barsi (Sholapur District) the unthinking officials extorted the full levy even though the poorer peasant had already sold his grain. In the Dang villages of Nagar District excessive levy denuded the villages of practically all their stocks, leaving nothing for the cultivator. Normally these parts run short of supplies from April onwards; but this year they have had next to nothing since December last.

Failure to seek people's co-operation, corrupt practices of local officials and reliance on mere coercion has very nearly shipwrecked Government's procurement plan. The lower sections were often harassed; the rich ones escaped lightly. Even the honest ones who wanted to sell to the Government hesitated. For every one had seen how corruption thrived in the distribution of sugar and kerosene; no one was, therefore, willing to trust his food in the hands of the Government. All doubt even now whether the purchase of surplus grain by the Government will really ensure food for the people. Almost all think that the purchases are only an instrument of corruption and profiteering. Naturally, therefore, there has been a tendency to underquote one's stocks, to escape the levy, to join the rich in denouncing procurement itself. All this has

led to chaos, less procurement, and famine conditions in the province.

Bombay, therefore, is in the midst of the most critical period. Four months have yet to pass before the kharif crop arrives in the market, and in the rural areas Government is already unable to supply more than 2 ounces per head. People are thrown on the black market but they can't afford to pay the extortionate prices. The only alternative is, therefore, starvation and death, for, who can subsist on rations of 2 to 4 ounces? The four months between July and October will be the most fateful for tens of thousands. Every day the situation must worsen unless drastic measures are taken to procure enough quantities of grain to ensure the minimum ration of 1 lb. per head for all.

III. PATRIOTS AND THE FOOD CRISIS

Have the people and their organisations discharged their responsibility in face of this grave crisis? Have the latter given the required lead to the people who are faced with starvation and death and don't know it? It cannot be denied that the responsibility for the present crisis must be shared also by patriotic organisations who have failed to show the way to our people.

The patent fact is that the entire surplus has not come out in the market. Who holds it? Not the foreign Government but men of the people—the middle and rich farmers, the latter especially, who made desperate efforts to escape any sales to the Government. Whose is then the failure if the middle peasant who is patriotic, who is prepared to do anything for his country, follows the rich ones, in pursuing a course which inflicts starvation on his fellow-countrymen? Undoubtedly it is of the popular organisations and patriotic bodies who refused to intervene and give a patriotic call to the peasant to sell all surplus to the Government and not to withhold stocks for future profits. It is strange that while leaders of public opinion declared everywhere that the present Government could not procure food for the people, they themselves would not even warn the people against selfish withholding of grain; they would not even tell them that the failure of procurement would hit the people and not the Government. No, not a word of it. On the contrary in some cases advantage was taken of the fact that the first scheme

was based on voluntary sales to practically tell the peasants not to sell to the Government.

Between the corruption and incompetence of Government officials and the indifference and even hostility of the popular bodies towards procurement, the people suffered. Patriotic organisations would not lead the middle peasant nor would they bring pressure on the rich to release all surplus grain. The rich bribed the lower officials and kept their stocks. The middle peasant fell a victim to profiteering and withheld his stocks. The bribed officials harassed the poor peasant. The rural poor began to starve with a ration of 2 oz. per head and famine reared its ugly head. Such is the sad story of popular failure.

HOW PATRIOTS LOOK AT IT

This suicidal policy of non-intervention in the food crisis, of opposition to any plan of procurement, just because it is sponsored by the Government, is the common outlook of patriots—Congressmen and non-Congressmen alike. Nothing perhaps has done more to aggravate the situation, already rendered worse by official mishandling, than this attitude of belligerent neutrality on the part of all public organisations. They shared with the peasant and the people the deep distrust of the Government and the schemes launched by it. Guided by their past experience they felt that to give additional powers to the Government in the matter of food was to invite harassment and chaos. Rightly indignant at the political repression and official callousness, Congressmen especially refrained from rendering support to any plans of grain procurement.

They missed however the extreme gravity of the situation and failed to underline the fact that only centralised procurement through Government could save the situation, provided the people and their representatives backed it and made it successful, that not to agree to Governmental procurement was tantamount to rejecting it altogether. Congressmen and non-Congressmen alike, therefore, only played the role of critics of the Government's measures, exposing its defects but not making any positive contributions, nor asking the people to do their duty.

This was the outlook which dominated the proceedings of the People's Food Council which was recently formed. To

the Council were invited a number of Congressmen and M.L.As., Muslim Leaguers and other individuals. The Council met when the food situation had become extremely grave and the Government had announced its plan of compulsory graded levy.

The tone of the Conference was set by Mr. Masani, who said in his presidential speech: "It (compulsory requisitioning) may be a sound policy to be implemented by a democratic Government having its roots in public confidence.... but it is open to grave doubts whether the same policy can with equal safety and success be implemented by an administration.... which is not responsible to the people and which has not so far been organised for purposes other than those of law and order and the collection of revenue." Should the people, therefore, move and see that procurement succeeds? Mr. Masani is silent—in fact he seems to think it is not the business of the people to do anything for their own food. At any rate, he does not seem to call them to come out with all surplus grain, to see that no hoarding takes place, in the interests of successful procurement and equal distribution.

The resolution of the Conference stated: "While not expressing any opinion on the merits of the scheme, this meeting places on record its opinion that in the light of past experience in the operation of the policies for the procurement and distribution of foodstuffs, difficulties may be forthcoming as in the past, which will call for early investigation and redress. It is essential, therefore, that all sections of the people of this province should come together for the purpose of subjecting the food policies of the administration to the searchlight of public criticism, of watching the working of arrangements for the procurement and distribution of foodstuffs and of securing the food requirements of the humblest members of society."

Thus did the resolution paraphrase Mr. Masani and fail to give any lead. There was no call to the people to stand by each other; to recognise the gravity of the situation and share food equally; there was no warning that without compulsory levy the majority of our people would starve; there was no patriotic call, that just because the Government was irresponsible the situation was grave beyond words, and that our fate, therefore, depended on whether we made procurement successful.

With this outlook is it any wonder that in these critical

days, when there is not enough food for human beings, a memorandum of the Council should demand grain feed for cattle? In a supplementary Note on Procurement Operations the Committee solemnly observes: "It may be argued that it would be wrong to give cereal food to cattle at a time when there is acute shortage of foodstuffs. There is force in this argument. At the same time in certain tracts like Karnatak, we are told that the traditional practice is to give some jowar to bullocks on working days and that the discontinuance of the practice is not desirable in the interest of maintaining the strength of the bullocks. Although the strictest economy in cereal feeds to ploughing bullocks is essential during the present hard times, it may not be wise to discontinue the age old practice altogether. We, therefore, think that the question of occasional bullock feeds should be taken into account in estimating the minimum requirements of cereals of an average family. We, therefore, suggest that the minimum requirements of an average holder be calculated to be more than 27.5 maunds and that provision should be made accordingly to raise the present exemption limit."

When tens of thousands are facing utter starvation, when every available surplus grain is required to save them, the memorandum of the Committee seriously demands that bullocks should be fed on cereals and provision should be made for it.

The Provincial Food Council, when it met in its first Conference raised high hopes. It was good that so many people belonging to different parties came together to consider the grave food situation. It was heartening to see Congressmen and Congress sympathisers taking lead and initiative in convening the Conference. But the initial results can only be described as disappointing.*

*Fortunately, the second sitting of the Food Council showed a return to sober realism. The developing distress could not fail to impress the members who now began to change their former outlook of indifference to food planning for one of helpful suggestions. Of course, as yet there is no call to the people to deliver all surplus grain and make a drive for successful procurement in the interest of all; but there has been no tendency to make exaggerated demands nor turn down proposals offhand.

In its resolution on minimum rations, passed on 4th July, the Council, while it expressed its concern over the fantastically low rations fixed in certain non-urban areas, made no

However, in the villages scores of Congressmen are silently working to rescue their people from starvation. They create opinion against hoarding; they ask the people to hand over all surplus to the Government to see that none starves; they take a lead in organising co-operative societies, in opening new shops to rescue distribution from corrupt hands. Their number is yet small and they are impelled forward only by the mounting distress.

For the province as a whole, the old outlook still persists. Neither Congressmen, nor other patriots realise the gravity of the situation created by the growing starvation in the rural areas and boldly call the peasant to hand over all surplus grain to the Government to save the province from famine. For all practical purposes the attitude of indifference and non-intervention continues when the province is threatened with a great disaster and only the people's organisations can save it.

exaggerated demands. Taking into consideration the state of provincial resources it only asked for the minimum quota of 1 lb. per head and turned down proposals to demand more.

At its first meeting the Council would not express any opinion on the procurement scheme. At the same time it made it quite clear that it was opposed to the present Government handling procurement.

The second sitting saw a distinct change; the Council accepted the necessity of procurement and made valuable and constructive suggestion re. lowering of the levy, utilisation of co-operatives, village panchayats etc. for distribution and procurement and lowering of prices of producers' and consumers' goods which the peasant requires. It also demanded procurement of the entire surplus through the levy. This is not done under the present scheme which leaves considerable surplus in the hands of the rich holders.

In its resolution on co-operatives, the Council asks the Government to associate public organisations in the execution of its food policy and calls upon popular food committees in the districts to organise co-operative institutions... with a view to their claiming from the Government active participation in the programme of increased food production, efficient procurement of the surplus, and equitable distribution of the various necessities of life.

No doubt compared with the first meeting of the Council the second meeting shows a big change of outlook, though considering the gravity of the situation it, by itself, will not take the people out of the crisis. For as yet there is no positive call to unhoard stocks, to secure all surplus from those who possess it and to make procurement a people's responsibility.

THE PEOPLE AND THE PLAN

Admittedly the plan suffers from many shortcomings, some of them quite serious too. Exaggerated estimates of yield will press hard on the smaller peasants; the principle of compulsion in the hands of lower officials will become only an instrument of harassment and so on. But before criticising the plan every honest man has to answer the question—given the present food situation in the province, is it necessary or not to have a plan of compulsory procurement and is it or is it not the duty of every patriot to see that procurement succeeds in the interest of our starving people? That the Government has launched the scheme, does not alter an iota of the fact that on its success depends the lives of tens of thousands. Those who oppose or criticize this or that aspect of the plan without making their attitude clear, without openly acknowledging that only compulsory procurement will save the people, only ignore the gravity of the situation. Their criticism is not likely to procure an additional morsel of food for the people. They are not prepared to face the plain fact that the only alternative to procurement is free trade—uncontrolled trade—an invitation to famine.

The first and foremost task before every honest man therefore, is to recognise that there is no alternative to compulsory procurement if the people of the province are to be saved. Secondly, that procurement can and will succeed only if all patriots and public organisations combine before it is too late, to see that it succeeds; that those who have more than enough come out with their surplus and sell it to the Government.

Popular intervention is crucial, for it is men from the people who are withholding grain; brother is set against brother in his selfishness simply because the selfless voice of patriotism does not beckon to all to do their duty. The grain is to be secured from our own countrymen for saving others.

A glance at the figures showing how the produce is distributed in the villages will show who holds a major part of the grain.

According to the Land Revenue Administration Report of the Bombay Government (1936-37) the total area under all crops in the district of Thana is 909,073 acres and the total number of holders is 85,938. Out of this 12,479 holders hold 660,276 acres, i.e. 14 per cent of the holders hold 66 per cent of the land. This is the class of holders who own above 15

acres. Assuming the same distribution of land in case of cereals this means that nearly 66 per cent of the cereals will be in the hands of 14 per cent of holders. The production of cereals in Thana was 170,172 tons for the year 1939-40. This means that nearly 112,000 tons will be in the hands of less than 12,000 holders since the latter number includes the growers of food other than cereals and also of non-food crops. Even if you give these holders 1½lb. per day and presume a family of six adults the surplus left over will be nearly 100,000 tons. After making full allowance for official exaggeration and mistakes, it cannot be denied that less than 14 per cent of the holders would be holding a considerable surplus which will easily feed thousands.

In the district of Ahmadnagar, the total area cultivated (1936-37 Report) is nearly 28 lakh acres. Total number of holders 105,667. Here again those who own above 25 acres number slightly more than 30,000 and they own nearly 19 lakh acres which means 18 per cent of holders own 53 per cent of the land. If those who own above 15 acres are included it will show a proportion of 33 per cent of the holders owning 86 per cent of the land.

The total cereal production of Ahmadnagar district was 257,538 tons in 1939-40. It means 129,000 tons was in the hands of less than 30,000 persons, leaving a surplus of not less than 120,000 tons. Again making all allowance for official exaggeration the surplus must be considerable and enough to feed thousands.

The table at the end gives figures for others districts, showing considerable surplus in the hands of a small minority.

When we think of the peasant, we generally think of the poverty-stricken peasant, with deficit economy. And that is but natural; for he forms an overwhelmingly large part of our peasantry. But this need not blind us to the fact that there is a section which owns considerable surplus produce—more than what is needed by it. We need not be blind to the differentiation in the villages and argue as if none in the village has a surplus.

It is a fact that the main requirements of our cities and the majority of our village population have always been met by the surplus of this strata, the middle and the rich farmers. None can deny it. Today these men who belong to the people are pursuing a policy which spells ruin and disaster to our people. Who can persuade both the middle and the rich

peasants to come out with their grain—can it be done better by means of a legal edict or a patriotic appeal? Which will be more powerful in saving the lives of the people—the orders of a District Magistrate or the patriotic call of our own countrymen?

The united voice of all organisations, all patriots, therefore, must reach the village, the small and the middle and the rich farmer, and call on them to come out with all surplus grain, and deliver it to the Government, for the sake of our own people in the name of patriotism. The middle and rich peasants must be told that in withholding grain from the market for the sake of profit, they are playing with the people's lives and committing a crime against the country.

For every pound of surplus grain that they hold, over and above their needs—they starve one countryman of theirs.

If they hold it for eight days they kill one. Let them not think of profiteering when their neighbour is dying inch by inch. Patriotism today means—feed your own countrymen even at loss to yourself.

If the people and their organisations, however, refuse to give this lead then the selfish war of hunger and profiteering must continue; thousands must starve and die and no amount of cursing the foreign Government will do away with the fact that the popular organisations failed to discharge their duty. Those who accept procurement in principle must see that it is put into practice. There is no other way out.

DEFECTS OF THE PLAN

Only on the basis of this honest attitude towards compulsory procurement, can the defects of the plan be removed. To concentrate on defects without accepting responsibility for procurement drive, is to join the traders and hoarders in blowing up all control and invite the regime of free trade. To sidetrack attention only on imports from outside, and refuse to do anything to mobilise the resources of the province is to cheat the people and encourage anti-national hoarding and withholding of grain. Quite a number of responsible people today are talking only about imports without making any appeal to the peasants to part with surplus grain. They would not fight selfishness in the ranks of the people; they only mislead them into the belief that the crisis could be easily solved by imports from outside the province though they fully know

that the capacity of India's surplus provinces is limited, and that imports from abroad do not afford the main remedy against famine.

In the criticism of the plan it is urged that the levies fixed are excessive; and that the estimates of yield are exaggerated out of all proportions. The poor peasant therefore, it is urged, will suffer most.

Official figures are full of errors and untrustworthy; to accept them as correct estimates of yield will of course be wrong. It might lead to chaos, oppression and harassment.

The remedy, however, does not lie in opposing the plan itself but in working it out and in the course of the work showing where the levy is excessive, where the yield is exaggerated. The Government cannot ignore the united voice of the people and their organisations when they are straining every nerve to bring out surpluses. There is no other way to fight out excessive levies, protect the small peasant and at the same time safeguard the province against famine. Any other way will automatically mean a fight against procurement itself. *The real sanction against excessive levies is the united people's initiative and drive for procuring all surplus... Even if the bureaucracy begins by ignoring the people's organisations it cannot continue to do so for long, the more it realises that they can deliver the goods.*

SAVE THE SMALL PEASANT

The second objection is against compulsion. It is urged that the principle of compulsion will only give a handle to lower officials to harass the poor peasants and leave the rich in full enjoyment of their surplus. What would we have therefore? No compulsion—a scheme based on voluntary sales? None can advocate it today. Without compulsion against the toughest landlords and anti-national and profiteering elements etc. no plan of procurement will succeed. And yet the fear that the poor peasant might be the victim is justified by last year's experience. What then is the way out? Not to give up compulsory levy but ensure through popular intervention that those who have parted with their surplus and those who have no surplus are not harassed; that corrupt officials are checked and rich stockists do not escape their share of the levy. Once more the key lies in the hands of the people and their organisations. Let them ask the small

peasant to support procurement and persuade the middle and rich farmers to part with their surplus ;—and the poor peasant will escape harassment at the hands of petty officials ; let the popular organisations take initiative, gather information about stocks, appeal to those who hold them and if they refuse even compel them by law to part with them. Their initiative and vigilance will check the lower officials, distribute properly the burden of procurement, make it impossible for the rich to escape with the help of corruption and bribery and save the small peasant—and the majority of the village population itself.

The small peasant must know that the procurement plan is in his own interest. He has not got enough stocks of food to go all the year round. It is an attempt to ensure food for him throughout the year. If the better-off farmers do not give up their surplus, if the plan fails, if he does not join in making it a success—it is he who will starve. Let him not be exploited by profiteers and selfish persons. They will tell him that by withholding grain, by not selling it to the Government, they are retaining it in the villages to meet his needs in times of distress. Is this true? Not in the least. By keeping grain in their possession, by not selling it to the Government, the rich peasants will only have the small peasant at their mercy ; they will demand black market prices from him which he cannot afford. They will starve him and the city alike. In his own interest and the interest of the people he must work for successful procurement and against hoarding.

CALL FOR EQUAL SACRIFICE

Yet another objection is that the quantity of 1 lb. per head is too little and that the peasant ordinarily eats more than that.

There is no doubt that 1 lb. per head will mean severe hardship for quite a number of peasants, especially for the middle and upper strata. Yet it is wrong to suppose that it will mean general and universal hardship ; for in the pre-war years, taking into account Bombay's production and exports, Bombay could have consumed only slightly more than 1 lb. per head. In 1941-42 per head consumption in Bombay was 1.021 lb. and in 1942-43 it was 0.97 lb. per day. The main question, however, is one of equal distribution. Should

the rich have more than 1 lb. while other sections of the village starve and even die? Considering our present resources we cannot afford more than 1 lb. to the producer—the middle and the rich one, who as a patriotic citizen is asked to forego his usual quantity for the sake of his people. Is there anything wrong in this? So long as we cannot afford the minimum quantity of 1 lb. for all so long as a section of our people is getting only 2 as. per day is it not wrong to allow the better-off producers to keep more than 1 lb. ? Equal distribution means equal sacrifice and the better-off peasant must be called upon to make it.

To demand more under the present circumstances is to demand favours for the middle and rich farmers and starve the rest. It must be remembered that the lives of tens of thousands depend on how much surplus is secured from the well-off elements. If these are allowed to keep more the rest will have less and must starve. The small peasant—who forms at least 40% of the producers is certainly not going to benefit thereby. He has not enough stock to meet his needs of the year. He must buy in the market and his share depends on how much the better-off farmers sell to the Government. Allow these latter to retain 1½ lb. per head and the small peasant starves.

To decry therefore the quantity of 1 lb. per head as too little, not to see in it an equalisation of conditions and not to call the rich producers to be prepared for this sacrifice is to invite starvation for the vast majority under the guise of defending its interests and only help the rich.

It is also objected that even on the basis of 1 lb. per head the quantity of 27½ maunds will be sufficient only for a family of five adults and that it will fall far short of the requirements of the larger families.

This defect of the scheme, which will certainly inflict hardship on a section of the peasantry can only be remedied by united public pressure and action in support of procurement, not by opposing it. It does not lessen the necessity of popular intervention for successful procurement but, on the contrary, makes it more necessary.

VILLAGE VERSUS CITY

Mischievous elements who often mislead the honest ones, insinuate that the plan is intended to rob the village to feed the city.

To create a false antagonism between the village and the city, when the patriotic unity of the two ought to be strengthened to fight the food crisis is to be guilty of misleading the people. Patriots can make only one appeal to the village folk—to keep more grain in the village than is necessary for its needs is to condemn your own men in the cities, your relatives, your fellow-countrymen to starvation and death. It is the privilege and honour of every producer to see that he does nothing whereby men who supply him with cloth, bring kerosene to him, give him sugar and tea are starved.

At the same time it is a lie to propagate that procurement is necessary only in the interest of the cities; that the villagers do not need it.

A vast majority of those who own less than five acres naturally do not produce enough for themselves and have to supplement their needs by buying in the market. How big the number is can be judged from the following. Out of those who cultivate with their hands with or without hired labour the proportion of those who had less than five acres was as follows in 1936-37 in the various districts:

Districts	Total No. of Holders.	Number below 5 acres
Ahmedabad	60,680	34,420
Kaira	124,413	97,312
Broach and Panchmahals	79,335	43,426
Surat	90,296	62,794
Thana	69,376	51,326
Ahmadnagar	126,633	36,744
East Khandesh	117,131	52,321
West Khandesh	57,330	11,413
Nasik	110,562	37,308
Poona	144,006	68,036
Satara	186,004	113,570
Sholapur	77,527	19,116
Belgaum	109,173	61,805
Bijapur	89,256	22,363
Dharwar	114,197	45,512
Kanara	28,413	21,914
Kolaba	44,729	34,132
Ratnagiri	67,117	54,332
Bombay Province	1,699,771	870,257

The proportion of this small-holder ranges from 20% to 30%. For the province as a whole those who own less than 5 acres are 50% of the total number of holders. Allowing for the fact that while some of these grow enough food for themselves, they also include others who only raise non-food crops, the proportion of those who must buy grain in the market, some time of the year or the other, cannot be less than 40% of the total.

Besides these there are the agricultural labourers who number anywhere between 40 to 60 lakhs, i.e., between 1/6th and 1/4th of the population. It is in the interest of the vast mass from the villages that procurement is necessary. Under these circumstances, to suggest that procurement is a device to rob the village to feed the city is deliberately to mislead the peasants and the people and hand them over to starvation and death.

The introduction of rationing in towns is also directly in the interest of the villages. Without rationing there would be no control over stocks in the towns. And unless such control is there the towns will attract large stocks denuding the village of its requirements. It has been the common experience in recent times that unless full control over stocks is exercised through rationing, traders and speculators pour huge quantities in the towns hoping to make a good profit. Rationing of towns, therefore, should not be made a grievance but should be demanded in the common interest of the town and village alike.

Sometimes the stupidity of official measures and their failure to treat the town and village on equal terms lends colour to the idea that the villages will be denied fair treatment under the procurement plan. The decision of the Bombay Government to fix a ration of 3/4 lb. per head for non-producers in non-urban areas of Gujerat, while giving a slightly larger quantity to the towns (25 lbs. per month) drew protests from the villages and was even exploited by certain vested interests to denounce procurement itself. It is true that in these non-urban areas the producers who form a considerable proportion of the population were allowed to retain 1 lb. per head. None could say that the entire village was penalised. Perhaps the average quantity per head would be more than that permitted in the towns. Nonetheless it was patent that a section of the village was getting less than

the townfolk. This should be remedied. There must be as far as possible, complete equalisation of conditions between the town and the village; and if necessary this equalisation should be brought about by reducing the ration of those who do light work in the towns and increasing that of those who like the rural labourers do heavy work in the villages. Unless this is done, and all suspicion of unfair treatment is removed the vested interests will succeed in uniting the village against procurement.

Some people advocate village self-sufficiency as against procurement. They are obviously of the opinion that the former would solve the food problem of the province. Can village self-sufficiency become a substitute for organised procurement? Of course not. There are surplus villages and there are deficit villages separated by hundreds of miles. In each village, besides, there are surplus producers and deficit producers. If each village were to stick to its own produce in the name of self-sufficiency, the deficit villages which number by hundreds will starve and die. Centralised procurement planning is therefore necessary to secure the surplus, transport it to distressed places and organise its distribution.

The advocates of self-sufficiency miss the problem of provincial distribution. They therefore generally fail to insist that the peasant must sell all surplus grain to the Government and that the surplus villages must send all their surplus to the deficit villages. All that they generally insist on is that the produce of the village should be kept in the village itself. If this were done, from where would the deficit areas get their supplies? No one will, of course, have any quarrel with those who honestly advocate that the village should not be denuded of its requirements for the sake of private profiteering, if they recognise the need to release all surplus grain for deficit areas. In the absence of this insistence village self-sufficiency is reduced to a selfish cry for each village looking after itself as best as it can, to hoarding in the fortunate villages while the unfortunate ones starve and die. It becomes a slogan of opposing all procurement and control under a mistaken notion of serving the village.

POLITICAL OBJECTIONS

The political objection most common among Congressmen is that any advocacy of procurement means co-operation with

a Government which represses the people, bans the Congress and keeps us in slavery. According to them it means helping the foreign Government.

Has it been decided by the National Congress that if a thief breaks into a neighbour's house you will not call the police since it involves co-operation with the Government, has it been decided that if the Japanese bombers set houses on fire we shall not call the A.R.P., for it means co-operation with the Government; or if there is an outbreak of cholera, no patriot should ask people to get themselves inoculated at the nearest Government station?

Congressmen, however, think that the food crisis is causing the collapse of the governmental administration; that to help procurement is to help the Government in stabilising its repressive regime which outlaws the Congress and denies power to the Indian people. Therefore so long as there is no political settlement and the Government does not hand over power, there can be no question of co-operation on the food front. The political settlement they say is fundamental and primary; everything else is of secondary importance.

Nothing could be more shortsighted than the above reasoning. The food crisis no doubt originated in the political and economic policies of the Government. But it is hitting the people, starving them, threatening to devastate their homes and render them helpless and demoralised. The suffering is being borne not by Government officials but by our own people. To allow the crisis to deepen, to refrain from organising procurement and distribution, will not automatically cause the collapse of the administration, but will only intensify the suffering of the people and instead of uniting them against official policy, will divide them and make them completely helpless. And neither freedom nor power comes to a helpless and divided people.

If it were true that the Government gets weakened through the intensification of the food crisis then there is but one honest way for all Congressmen, and, that is, to tell the peasants not to surrender any grain to the Government. However, where will this lead? To hoarding by rich and middle peasants and mass starvation among the poor—a split in the village and a war between the poorer strata and the middle and rich peasants. The mass of the people will be ranged against Congressmen and disruption in the villages will be complete. Only the bureaucracy will emerge power-

ful out of the conflict.

The fact is that a people gets politically stronger not by bowing down to the distress created by the administration nor by intensifying it but by removing it and saving itself from it. For Congressmen, therefore, to take a lead in solving the food problem is to strengthen our people and not the repressive regime. Such strengthening and unity does not stabilise the present regime but only accelerates transfer of power. It becomes a big lever to achieve the main political objective of the present period—namely, National Government. The prospect of co-operation therefore need not frighten anyone.

Our national movement has opposed co-operation when it is co-operation against the interests of the people and for strengthening the bureaucracy. At the same time it has never given up its right to compel the present Government to do its duty by the people and accept people's co-operation for it.

To refrain from supporting procurement on the ground that it means co-operation with the Government is to hand over the people to the tender mercies of corrupt officials and finally, to starvation and death. To do this is in reality to co-operate with the officials in beating down the people.

By adopting this course Congressmen would be failing in their primary duty of serving the people in the most critical period and letting down the banner of the Congress.

The talk of non-cooperation will not hide the fact that Congressmen failed their countrymen in the most critical situation facing them. For the first time in the history of the Indian movement Congressmen might be correctly reproached for deserting the people. This and nothing else will be the result of their fear of co-operation.

Sjt. Mavlankar, Congress Speaker of the Bombay Assembly recently replied to these doubts and hesitations. In an interview granted to a Marathi paper in May last Sjt. Mavlankar said that it was essential to send grain from the villages to the cities. When asked whether for Congressmen to participate in the plan will not mean co-operation, Sjt. Mavlankar said: "Co-operation according to me means saying yes to everything that the Government does, simply because Government does it and without regard to its merits or defects. But it is not such co-operation if we get even the Government to do those things that are essential for feeding

the people in the present crisis. As servants of the people we have to do everything to satisfy their vital needs. It will be improper for us to be side-tracked by a theoretical controversy over co-operation versus non-co-operation. We must look upon it as a question of expediency, as a question of people's needs."

IV. THE WAY OUT

Bombay, as we have seen, is on the brink of a disaster. The shortage of food is rapidly being converted into a famine. The Government has practically announced its inability to give 1 lb. per head to the non-producers in rural areas and some of the towns also. It is planning distribution on the basis of $3\frac{1}{4}$ lb. per head. In reality some parts in rural areas are getting only 2 ounces which is not only far below the famine code ration, but a ration of death and disease. It may be a matter of few days before these conditions lead to serious loss of life.

How did this situation arise? Not only because an incompetent and foreign bureaucracy rules the land but also because our own people—the patriotically-minded middle peasant and the rich peasant—have declined to surrender their grain not understanding the gravity of the situation; because no patriotic party appealed to the peasant to come out with all surplus stocks in the name of his people, his country and its freedom.

The prevailing crisis, endangering the lives of thousands, is thus a direct challenge to every patriot, Congressman and non-Congressman alike. It asks him but one question—must Bombay go the Bengal way, just because he does not want to stir himself and stand by the people? It tells him at the same time that he can save his people and enhance the power and prestige of the national movement as the true defender of the interests of all sections of the people.

This task can only be discharged by uniting all popular forces, all popular organisations and political parties—Congress, League, Communist, Scheduled Caste etc. No single party will be able to save the people whatever may be its pretensions. Any hesitation in co-operating with each other will spell ruin and disaster for the province; for we have to remove the obstacles and prejudices created by the bureaucracy; we have to move the entire people—not this or that section only—to overcome their fear or indifference about

procurement; to understand the gravity of the situation and give up selfish habits of each looking after himself.

The formation of united food committees in districts, taluks and villages therefore, becomes essential if any honest work is to be done for saving the people from starvation and sure death. Nothing will convince the people of the gravity of the food situation more than the joint and united appeal of Congress, League, Scheduled Caste and other leaders; nothing will rouse all sections against black marketing and profiteering than the powerful appeal of food committees in which all organisations are represented.

In the villages who will convince the peasant to surrender surplus grain, to give up selfishness, except a committee in which he finds all sections united and whose appeal is the appeal of his own brethren. The united food committees representing village unity alone will strike a patriotic chord in the heart of the middle peasant and exercise a powerful pressure on the rich. Unless they see that the entire village is determined to secure all surplus stocks, most of the rich peasants will not surrender theirs.

The establishment of all-parties Village and Town Food Committees is, therefore, a matter of primary importance in the battle against the developing famine.

THE TASKS

What are the tasks facing the food committees, or those patriots who may be working on their own in the absence of such committees? (1) In the towns and cities they must bring home to the people the gravity of the food crisis and strive to unite them. (2) They must agitate for rationing where it is not yet introduced and see that the people participate in the census taking operations to expedite it. (3) They must fight the tendency to give exaggerated figures of persons per family to draw larger rations and denounce it as stealing of people's food. (4) They must create public opinion against black markets and appeal to the people not to patronise them. At present even honest and responsible persons habitually resort to them. They must be made to realise that to encourage black markets in towns, to patronise them, is to rob the villages of their food and take a hand in starving our people. (5) They must denounce hoarding and demand that officials should help them in tracking down hoarders

and in unhoarding stocks. (6) They must support compulsory procurement and appeal to the peasants to hand over all surplus grain at the same time making it quite clear that only the surplus should be taken from the peasant and nothing more. They should agree to champion all the just and legitimate grievances of the peasant in the matter of procurement. (7) They should demand equal treatment between the village and town and offer if necessary to agree to less rations for those doing light work in the towns, so that heavy workers in the villages, like rural labourers, get at least as much as the town dwellers. (8) They should further demand the restoration of the cut in imports quota and appeal to the people in surplus provinces to see that Bombay's minimum needs are met.

IN THE VILLAGES

Today the primary task of the village food committee is to campaign for a successful procurement drive, for bringing to the common pool all surplus grain, for unhoarding stocks of those who would conceal them. The village food committees must make the people conscious of the grave crisis that threatens to overtake them and bring starvation and death to thousands.

First and foremost, full support must be given to compulsory procurement and the people should be told that on its success depends their own fate and the fate of their countrymen. The peasants' fears and doubts about procurement, harassment, Government's intentions etc. must be answered and they must be convinced that procurement is in the interests of the people and that unless it is done, tens of thousands will starve.

The united voice of all organisations, of the village committees, should tell the peasants—middle, poor, rich—that no one has a right to keep anything above his needs when thousands are faced with starvation.

Withhold 1 lb. more per day than your needs and you starve a countryman of yours every day; withhold 1 lb. for eight days and you become directly responsible for the death of one. Not to hand over all surplus grain is to war against your people, against your country, and to act like a common bandit devoid of all patriotism... It is anti-national to try to escape the levy when you can meet it—for thereby you de-

fraud your own people of their minimum ration ; it is anti-national to understate stocks in your possession, for thereby you cheat your own starving countrymen.

Requisitioning is in the interests of the small peasant himself, if it does not succeed he will be at the mercy of black marketeers. He must therefore lead the fight. If he leads it then alone he can save himself from excessive levies and harassment at the hands of corrupt officials. Otherwise the rich will escape and he will be forced to pay excessive quotas. Patriotism and his interest alike demand that the small peasant should support the compulsory levy.

Coming out with all his surplus is today the acid test of patriotism for the middle and the rich farmers. It is in times of crisis that the real mettle of the people is tested. The middle peasant—whose sons in many places are the local organisers of the Congress, who himself supports the Congress—can he remain true to the traditions of the national organisation and yet withhold his grain for the sake of profit? Can he for the sake of profit see death and famine round him? Every lb. of grain given saves the life of one man ; 4 lbs. an entire family. Will he be the saviour of starving families or their murderer—that is the question before him. He himself has seen bad and good days and let him not forget his bad days in his selfishness.

The rich farmers, who often bribe corrupt officials must know that their selfishness will lead to hundreds of deaths. Do they like this prospect? Do they put a few hundred rupees above the lives of their countrymen? Many of them have suffered in the cause of the nation. They must today lead their village by asking the village representatives to examine their stocks and agreeing to hand over all surplus to the Government.

The peasant should be impressed that it is his patriotic duty not only to meet the levy (unless it is beyond his capacity) but also to sell to the Government all surplus left in his hands after paying the levy. The law may not require it but the needs of his countrymen do. The appeal should especially be made to the rich peasants in whose hands considerable stocks are bound to accumulate even after honestly paying the levy.

The peasant has to be convinced that in estimating the surplus only 1 lb. per head per day can be allowed as the requirements of an adult. This will no doubt mean privations and sufferings for many. But the province can't afford more than that. To give the producer more will mean death for vast numbers. Will the peasant have it? Let him remember that

many are already getting only 2 ounces per day. He must therefore accept 1 lb. in the spirit of self-sacrifice and patriotism. If, however, procurement succeeds fully then the province will certainly be able to afford to give him a slightly larger quantity ; and his will be the first claim. He should not be misled by those who without thinking raise the cry for increased rations, not knowing that this will mean outright death for hundreds.

This powerful appeal of patriotism should rouse all honest elements to come out with their surpluses. If mass campaigns are carried on in the villages the entire middle peasantry, and a section, at least, of the rich, are bound to be moved and pour out all the stocks in their possession. This will make a big addition to the stocks available for distribution and save hundreds from death.

There will still remain considerable stocks with anti-social elements in the villages. The village committees, if they really represent the people, will be in a position to know who possess clandestine stocks. *There should be no hesitation in demanding official help to unearth these stocks and make them available for distribution. No mercy should be shown to these hoarders just as none is shown to those who loot or murder or organise communal rioting.*

In many places, where procurement has officially ended, unhoarding of stocks of the rich peasants will be the main source of securing additional grain for the people. Notably is this the case in the rice-growing districts of the province, like Thana and Colaba, where the rice millers and the agents appointed by the Government and rich landlords hold huge stocks with the knowledge of the local officials. Any weakness therefore, in unhoarding, will only harm the people. Needless to say, even for such unhoarding public opinion and people's unity is necessary ; otherwise the hoarder might either escape with the aid of corrupt officials or appear as a martyr and demagogically appeal to the people to fight procurement.

DEMAND IMPROVEMENTS

Waking to procure all genuine surplus, and backed by the people, the food committees will be in a position to put pressure on officials to co-operate with them and lay their cards on the table. In discharging the practical task of organising procurement, they will get ample evidence to see where Gov-

ernment estimates are exaggerated, where excessive levies are fixed, where realisation of levies will only mean starvation. They will thus be in a position to lay their finger on all abuses and excesses; and put a stop to them through their vigilance and strength of unity.

In the interest of successful procurement the Village Food Committees will have to demand and secure a number of improvements in the present scheme.

(1) The smaller peasant has suffered a lot due to exaggerated estimates of yield and excessive levies. There are instances where his family is exposed to outright starvation. In all such cases the village committees must either secure exemption for the peasant; or, if the grain is already taken from him, adequate compensation in the shape of grain at the rate at which Government bought from him.

(2) According to the Government the present scheme does not take away the entire surplus. The scale of levy is so adjusted that it is supposed to leave some surplus over and above the minimum needs of the family. In the hands of the rich farmers this surplus must be accumulating a big quantity. The Committee should demand that all such surplus left with the holders after making provision for their minimum needs and paying the levy, should be compulsorily taken by the Government at prescribed rates. This surplus will not only add to the stocks of the province, and go a long way in alleviating distress, it will also enable the Government to grant relief to the poor peasant and those on the border line, and enable them to escape starvation. 'None should be allowed to keep any surplus over and above his minimum needs' should be the slogan of the committees. This will enable the people to secure stocks of the rich peasants which otherwise would go to the black-market.

(3) The present scheme allows a family to retain only 27½ maunds to meet its needs. This is enough only for a family of 5 adults, but is insufficient for larger families of more than six persons. Provision, therefore, must be made for allowing such families to keep larger stocks in accordance with the number of persons in the families or to give them supplementary rations from Government shops at the rate at which Government buys from them. This also requires an obligation on the part of the village committees to see that families consisting of less than five persons do not keep with them the maximum quota of 27½ maunds but only what is needed for

their requirements.

(4) The Food Committees must demand fair price to the peasant for his produce and also reduction in the price of industrial articles consumed by him.

(5) They should see that the lower officials do not cheat the peasants of fair price or harass them, and get redress of all grievances about unjust treatment—harassment, etc.

(6) They should strive to see that every one in the village gets the minimum ration of 1 lb. and unitedly defeat all attempts to drastically reduce the ration. Village unity should be built to see that all get an equal share.

(7) One of the reasons why even honest people are sceptical about procurement is that they are not sure that they will get the grain from the Government in times of need. Only Village Food Committees can allay this fear by ensuring that enough is kept to satisfy the requirements of the village.

(8) Support should be given to the proposed measure to transfer lands from non-food crops to food-crops. Whatever defects there may be in the proposed legislation, the principle that more land should be brought under food is unassailable. Defects and clauses which unnecessarily penalise the peasant must be modified or removed. Peasants growing commercial crops which give a bigger money return, are likely to oppose the measure wholesale. They should be appealed to in the name of the people and their own interests.

A DIFFICULT TASK

The procurement of all surplus grain is not an easy thing to accomplish. Patriots have to contend against deep-rooted and just suspicions about the intentions of the Government; against ignorance of the situation in the ranks of the people and consequent selfishness; against machinations of vested interests who know nothing except profiteering; and against a suspicious bureaucracy which is not free from corruption.

The vested interests will do their best to set the entire village against patriotic intervention for procurement; they will circulate panicky rumours about official intentions in procuring; the pet theme will be that all grain is collected for the army or for export; they will exploit every instance of official high-handedness against the smaller man to blow up successful procurement and make a desperate attempt to dis-

rupt the unity of the village and tear away the middle peasant from the mass of peasants ; they will appeal to the selfishness of the middle peasant ; they will attempt to defeat unhoarding, and mislead the village people saying that they keep grain only to help the village in times of need ; that by unhoarding the grain will go out of the village. They will fight desperately to disrupt the united food committees for they realise that unity will spell defeat for them.

The bureaucracy will not lag behind in its opposition to popular initiative. Its distrust of the people and its callousness will form a major obstacle in the way of patriots and food committees. Barring a few notable exceptions the District officials look upon every popular organisation or initiative with extreme suspicion and distrust. They are jealous of popular bodies and some of them would rather see procurement ruined than make it successful with people's help. If you formally offer them co-operation they will quite nonchallantly tell you that they have more than enough of it. The provincial Government itself follows the same policy. When it talks of co-operation with the people it does so in a purely formal sense. Its idea of co-operation does not extend beyond formal consultation with no voice to the people. Very rarely does it take influential representatives of the people on its committees.

There will be many obstacles. Meetings to propagate for procurement may not be allowed, as they were not allowed to the squads of the Communist Party by some district magistrates. Petty officials who know that with people's representatives on the spot, with village committees functioning, their corruption will have to stop will arrest those honestly working for procurement and attempt to provoke the people. Instances are not wanting to show that lower officials often submit false reports against those working for procurement.

The higher authorities might endorse the action of the lower officials. Errors of exaggerated estimate may not be accepted even when proved to the hilt. No help might be rendered in unearthing stocks. Those giving information about stocks might themselves be harassed.

Yet in spite of all these obstacles, food committees will have to march ahead to succour our own people. They should not feel disappointed or demoralised if the bureaucracy refuses to accept their co-operation. Nor should they allow themselves to be deflected from the main course by the petty harassment, arrests and pinpricks of the bureaucracy.

Officialdom will bow the moment it finds all village ranks and parties united; the moment it finds that people's food committees can deliver the goods and ensure successful procurement. It will oppose and conspire only when it can take advantage of people's selfishness and disunity; the moment popular ranks are united, the moment it sees surplus stocks coming out, which all its forcible means could not have brought out, its opposition will crumble and open the way to save our people.

The task to be achieved in face of these difficulties is not a small one. As has been shown, Government at best might have secured 400,000 tons since the first procurement plan. This is too little if we allow only 1 lb. per head for every producer and intend to take away the rest of the surplus from him. The total produce available for distribution is nearly 3 million tons. The figure of self-sufficient producers and their dependents, who either produce enough or more than sufficient may according to official calculations come near 112 lakhs. Their annual requirements on the basis of 1 lb. per day will be 19 lakh tons. This leaves a surplus of not less than 11 lakh tons, out of this we must deduct the quantity consumed by those who do not produce enough for themselves—the small peasant etc. This will leave at least 8 lakh tons of surplus whereas Government has been able to purchase only 4 lakh tons, i.e., half the real surplus. Even if we decide to acquire only 2 lakh tons more, it will go a long way towards meeting the situation. For these two lakhs will feed at least 36 lakhs of people in the coming four months. And the crisis will certainly be under control if popular hands are able to procure three lakhs.

This of course is a stupendous task—a task which only the patriotic forces can do and which only patriotism can achieve. No legal edicts, no orders or ordinances will achieve it; only the living people actuated by the love of their country can do it. It will require every ounce of patriotism, self-sacrifice, heroism and determined will to save our people from the yawning disaster. Nothing but a huge mass campaign patriotically conducted will achieve it.

I M P O R T S

The growing success of the campaign will give flesh and blood to the demand for additional imports, for restoring the old

quota. It will bring sufficient pressure on the Central Government to give additional help. Above all it will activate the patriots in surplus provinces to mobilise all their resources for the aid of Bombay. They will not remain quiet when they see the peasant in Bombay coming forth with his surplus for the good of all and willingly putting up with a lot of hardships. None will miss the patriotic significance of the procurement drive conducted by the people; all will be roused to help Bombay in this critical situation and additional imports can be easily secured.

OTHER TASKS

Having procured grain the Village Committees must see that enough is kept for the village and the rest is quickly sent to the district or Taluk centres for despatch to deficit areas; that people's grain is properly stored, that it does not rot due to official carelessness or is not stolen by dishonest individuals.

There have been cases where grain was completely spoiled because some callous officials had kept it in the open in railway stations. There have been not a few cases of theft of procured grain; bags of grain have mysteriously disappeared from the godowns; in supplying figures to the higher authorities procurement receipts were understated and the difference was sold in the black market; in places, those who sold to the Government were not given receipts for the full quantity sold, once more the difference was sold for private profit. The Village Committees have to exercise their vigilance against these pilferings and misappropriations and damage, for every lb. of grain lost will mean starvation for somebody somewhere.

D I S T R I B U T I O N

The officials by prohibiting private trade in grain, have taken upon themselves the task of organising distribution. Hitherto their performance has hardly been creditable. They have not yet opened the scheduled number of shops planned by them months ago, though the crisis is getting acuter every day.

It seems organisation of distribution in the rural areas is almost beyond the capacity of the bureaucracy. Between its incompetence, corruption and distrust of the people it can

neither take a correct census nor run a shop honestly. Number of officials had to postpone rationing or organised distribution because enumeration done by their subordinates was found to be thoroughly unreliable. And yet if all these problems are not tackled nothing can save the people notwithstanding all the procurement plans. The black marketeer will get into the official machinery and beat down the people at every step and drive them to death, as he did in Bengal. The only alternative to popular intervention is famine.

Today corruption, jobbery, and indirect looting go on in the name of distribution in many places. Distribution is on the verge of collapse either because there are no shops or because they are not honestly run and people are forced to resort to the black-market to keep off starvation.

In parts of Deogarh Taluka in Ratnagiri district, certain villages have government shops to supply the needs of those who do not possess any grain of their own. Some of these shops at any rate are managed by sowcars and village notorieties with the result that quite a large number of people do not get any grain ; it is sent to the black-market where these unfortunate people have to buy it at exorbitant prices.

In the same Taluka some village shops get enough grain to distribute among those who really do not have any stocks of their own. But there being no ration cards, even those who are not in need buy from these shops with the result that the quantity per head has to be reduced and the really needy have to satisfy themselves with a smaller quantity.

In some villages where local officials were taking a census for purposes of rationing, they intimidated many families to show less number of members saying that if they showed a larger family the Government would next year fix a higher procurement quota against them.

In certain villages of Thana district, the sowcars who employ village labourers release them from work only after the Government shop is closed, so that the labourers are forced to buy at black market prices from the sowcar himself.

The woes and sufferings of our people know no bounds, they are there because our people are helpless in their lack of unity and organisation ; they are robbed by traders and sowcars they are fleeced by petty officials, they are deprived even of their miserable ration ; there seems to be only one escape for them—death. For what can one wish for when not only

officials harass but one's own countrymen also rob ?

Lack of people's initiative has created this anarchy and suffering which our countrymen can certainly be spared. The people through Food Committees must strive to get distribution in their own hands and organise it so that the procured grain is equally shared by all. While pressing for rationing in the towns, they must demand it in the villages. They should offer help to the Government in taking census of the village population standing in need of buying food, they volunteer to run village shops or supervise the working of Government shops whenever necessary; they should break the present monopoly of vested interests and lower officials who only fleece the people through these shops.

Both in the urban and rural areas the committees should encourage consumers' co-operative societies to purchase and sell grain for their members. Thousands can be organised through co-operative societies to protect their own food and eliminate the black-market. In parts of Gujerat the movement has already made great strides. Full advantage should be taken of the Government's policy to give preference to co-operative societies and people be asked to run their own societies and protect themselves against profiteers and black-marketeers. Care should be taken to see that the co-operative is really based on people's mobilised resources and is not financially controlled by any profiteer.

The main aim in organising distribution is to save the people from the black-market and starvation; to see that all get an equal share of the procured grain; that the peasant's sacrifice in keeping only 1 lb. for himself is not made in vain but really saves his countrymen from hunger, that grain is sold at controlled prices, that subsidised shops are established for those who are too poor to buy at the control prices, making it possible for them to buy their full ration; that a strict system of rationing is introduced in the villages and those who grow their own food or have enough stock of their own do not come to the shops.

The primary objective is to remove the dangerous chaos in distribution which is bound to lead to loss of life and famine, to eliminate profiteering, black-marketing and dishonesty, and see that every one gets at least the minimum ration of 1 lb.

CALL TO PATRIOTS

These are the tasks facing all patriots, all parties and public organisations in the coming four months which are bound to be fateful. The Central Government, beaten by the hoarders in other provinces has cut down the imports quota regardless of the needs of the province. It would not make up this deficiency by importing from abroad the minimum quantity recommended by the Gregory Committee. The Provincial authorities shunning people's co-operation, hostile to almost every act of popular initiative, and relying solely on the bureaucracy and their yes-men many of whom are the worst kind of profiteers, have bungled the procurement plan; they have harassed and antagonised the small peasant; they have thrown the middle peasant into the arms of the profiteers; they have discredited the procurement plan as a plan of corruption and harassment; they have not been able to secure the support of any section in the village. A plan which should have roused the peasant to rally for his people and his country, has made him hostile. Large stocks lie in the villages—mostly in the hands of rich farmers or traders, and partly in the hands of the middle peasant himself.

The Government has failed to secure control of sufficient stocks. Its scheme of rationing in not less than 70 towns hangs fire. Its intention of introducing rationing in the rural areas is yet a pious wish. It has given up the ghost and practically declared its inability to give the minimum ration of 1 lb. per head. It is openly basing its plan on the $3\frac{1}{4}$ lb. ration in rural areas—a ration of devitalisation and starvation. In actual reality, in many places the Government shops allow only 2 to 7 ounces per head and nothing more. The shadow of famine stretches across the province.

In Government shops the supply of grains is not regulated. The shops are often farmed out to dishonest individuals who whisk away the meagre supplies into the black market. The mass of the rural poor who come to the shops from a distance of eight to ten miles have often to trek back to the place without any grain—to live on carrots, sweet potatoes and jack-fruit. Death stares the people in face and it is a question of a few days before it catches the province in its all-powerful grasp.

Popular indifference and non-intervention in the food crisis has brought our people face to face with ruin and

disaster. With every day the situation rapidly worsens endangering the very existence of thousands of homes. None can save the situation except the people themselves—their political parties and organisations. Will they do it—that is the question. Will they allow Bombay to become another Bengal—cursing the bureaucracy all the while—or will they in the coming four months rouse the people to battle against famine and succeed in spite of the bungling of the buréaucracy—this is the question to be answered. On that answer depends the lives of thousands and the future of our patriotic parties among our people.

NOTE TO THE TABLE

Figures in Nos. 1, 2 and 3 are taken from the "Land Revenue Administration Report" and the "Season and Crop Report."

Figures in No. 4, 5, 6 and 7 are calculated on the basis of figures from the reports mentioned above.

Figures in No. 8 are obtained thus: First the ratio of acreage under cereal production to total acreage in each district is calculated separately on the basis of the figures in the "Season and Crop Report." Fig. in No. 8 is equal to Fig. in No. 1 (i.e. total No. of holders) multiplied by this ratio.

Fig. in 9 is equal to Fig in No. 3 multiplied by the ratio in No. 7.

Figures in No. 10 are calculated on the basis of 1 lb. per head for a family of six persons.

Fig. in No. 11 is equal to Fig in No. 9 minus Fig. in No. 10. The figures of total holders include rent-receivers also.

	Ahmednagar	E Khandesh	W.Khandesh	Nasik	Poona	Satara	Sholapur	Belgaum	Bijapur	Dharwar	N.Kanara	Ratnagiri	Kolaba	Thana	B'bay Suburban	Ahmedabad	Kaira	Broach & Panchmahals	Surat	Total Bombay Province
(1) Total no of holders	1,65,607	1,50,657	71,959	1,49,250	1,82,367	2,29,718	1,13,259	1,57,539	1,40,096	1,73,561	48,520	80,775	62,590	85,938	4,515	84,926	1,68,933	1,00,297	1,17,298	22,91,415
(2) Total land held by them (in acres)	27,69,236	19,50,068	15,07,487	22,53,072	21,62,589	17,39,856	23,59,667	15,91,105	28,53,818	22,15,523	3,31,626	4,20,775	4,33,606	9,09,073	11,134	7,98,059	7,82,966	9,76,062	7,42,110	2,68,04,799
(3) Total output of cereals (in tons)	2,57,538	1,76,311	1,89,742	2,73,678	2,46,879	2,15,112	2,18,280	2,27,055	1,72,906	2,77,950	70,907	1,70,663	1,96,478	1,70,172	5,563	2,53,601	1,33,749	1,78,314	73,381	35,08,779
(4) No. of holders of land above 15 acres	58,414	31,826	29,325	44,488	42,618	29,806	49,708	26,232	58,044	41,342	4,803	6,560	7,333	12,479	164	12,177	8,728	15,615	10,586	4,91,789
(5) Ditto. % of total no. of holders	35	21	40	30	24	13	44	17	41	24	10	8	12	14	4	14	5	16	9	21
(6) Total land in the hands of holders above 15 acres (in acres)	20,98,129	12,06,085	11,82,281	16,52,785	14,05,355	9,10,059	19,38,410	9,75,012	22,71,045	14,07,853	2,05,865	2,47,166	2,82,261	6,70,550	5,231	4,89,061	2,91,328	5,67,285	3,72,649	1,81,61,102
(7) Ditto. % of total land in the hands of all holders	76	62	78	73	65	52	82	61	80	64	62	59	65	74	48	61	37	58	50	68
(8) No. of holders of land above 15 acres, growing cereals	42,642	10,820	16,128	28,917	35,799	16,691	36,783	15,739	37,728	99,423	3,362	5,051	6,159	7,861	70	6,819	4,713	7,026	3,174	2,95,073
(9) Their total output of cereals (in tons)	1,95,728	1,09,312	1,47,999	1,99,785	1,60,471	1,11,858	1,78,990	1,38,504	1,38,325	1,77,888	43,962	1,00,691	1,27,711	1,25,927	2,670	1,54,697	49,547	1,03,422	36,690	23,85,970
(10) Quantity of cereals required by their families (in tons)	41,790	10,604	15,806	28,339	35,084	16,358	36,048	15,425	36,974	19,035	3,295	4,950	6,036	7,704	69	6,683	4,619	6,886	3,111	2,89,172
(11) Surplus remaining in their hands (in tons)	1,53,938	98,708	1,32,193	1,71,446	1,25,387	95,500	1,42,942	1,23,079	1,01,351	1,58,853	40,667	95,741	1,21,675	1,18,223	2,601	1,48,014	44,928	96,536	33,579	20,96,000

(in round figures)

Printed by Sharaf Athar Ali, New Age Printing Press, 190B,
Khetwadi Main Road, Bombay 4, and published by him for
People's Publishing House, Raj Bhawan, Sandhurst Road,
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