

FOOD

in the **UNITED
PROVINCES**

BY S. G. SARDESAI

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P R E F A C E

AFTER the heavy rains and hailstorms that occurred in the province for three weeks during March and April no argument is needed to prove the gravity of the food situation in U.P.

A record Rabi crop, better even than last year's was expected before the showers. After them even Government expect the wheat crop to be reduced to 90% of the average, barley 80% and gram 75%. And official figures unquestionably underestimate the loss suffered to a very great extent. In the central and eastern parts of the province the damage done has been very extensive, and in many places not less than 50% of the crop has been ruined. Apart from the grain completely destroyed what has been saved has naturally deteriorated in quality.

Immediately following on the rains there has been a shocking rise in the price of grains. All over the province wheat went up from between $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 seers a rupee to $2\frac{1}{2}$ seers. In some places, it has risen to $2\frac{3}{4}$ seers.

Beginning from October last, food prices in U. P. declined steadily for nearly six months, as a result of which people generally had become quite complacent regarding the food situation. The rains have shattered that complacency. Deep anxiety and even alarm have taken its place.

It is clear, however, that renewed interest in the food problem cannot by itself suffice to solve it. No solution of the food problem is possible unless the people led by the Congress and the Muslim League intervene in it unitedly, wholeheartedly, and on the basis of a correct understanding and policy. If the basic reasons that have stood in the way of such intervention till now are not removed, the recent calamity will only intensify the existing gloom and helplessness among the people. "Last year we suffered because of official callousness and bungling, this year nature itself has struck us a blow," this will be the only popular verdict on the question offered in a spirit of utter fatalistic resignation.

WHY NO INTERVENTION ?

What are the reasons that prevent our patriotic organisations coming forward to grapple with the issue with confidence and vigour ?

The first is popular ignorance regarding the facts of the problem. In particular, the real history of the food question in 1943 is not at all known to the public. And without knowing how food scarcity developed during the last year it is neither possible correctly to understand today's situation nor to find the way out of it. It is true that all the necessary information on the subject is not available and the reliability of what can be secured leaves much to be desired. But that only makes it so much more necessary to study what is available, and not to become a food doctor without looking into the A. B. C. of food anatomy.

Absence of information does not merely prevent people from drawing correct conclusions on the issue. Food is such a vital question that whether people are properly informed on it or not they will form their opinions and do something in the matter. Obviously this means prejudices and superficial appearances passing for truth, and blind and desperate action taking the place of an intelligent policy genuinely in popular interest. No responsible patriotic organisation can allow the people to follow such a path, which far from getting them food only heightens their want, misery and helplessness.

The second reason which arises from the first is the firm feeling, almost a conviction, prevalent among the mass of patriots including Congress and Muslim League leaders that in the present circumstances, effective intervention in the food situation is really not possible. It is recognised that the bureaucracy by itself is incompetent to tackle the question. But it is also felt that its policy is one of utter disregard for popular good, that it just will not tolerate people coming forward to solve the problem.

Third is the common feeling among the bulk of Congressmen that food work involves subservience to government officials. It is said that if the situation in a place or province goes to the limit it did in Bengal Congressmen might put aside their principles and even their self-respect, but otherwise it is wrong and impermissible for them to bend or even cooperate with Government on the issue.

Fourth is the argument also widely accepted that at best

the campaign for food is a humanitarian campaign. It cannot solve the major political problem facing the people, the problem of power. And that on the contrary, the struggle for food sidetracks popular attention from the movement for achieving such power. As such, food work may be taken up when from a humanitarian point of view it is unavoidable, but otherwise popular attention and energies should not be diverted to it from the vital struggle of the people for national freedom.

It is the purpose of this pamphlet to deal with all these questions. It is its purpose to examine the seriousness of the food question in the province, as also its nature, causes, solution and political implications. It is its purpose to examine whether the helplessness which people and even the Congress and the League feel today on the issue of food arises in reality from popular weakness or because a correct, bold and confident lead on the issue is not coming from the leadership of the two organisations.

MAIN PROPOSITION

It will be helpful to state the main conclusions of the pamphlet at the outset so that readers may be able to follow the contents more easily.

The food situation in the province would be serious even without the recent rains and despite the fall in prices that preceded them. The rains have sharply accentuated the situation but not created it.

The origin of the food crisis lies in the extremely narrow-minded, incompetent and autocratic manner in which the Government tries to handle the question and in its fear of seeking popular co-operation in its solution. Just as the Government attempts to defend the country from Japanese aggression without parting with political power, in the same way, it tries to solve the food question also without popular co-operation.

The acute intensification of the food crisis, however, leading to mass starvation and deaths lies in the conscious exploitation of the situation so created by the hoarder, mainly the trader-hoarder, and the fact that Government, which begins by attempting to tackle the question without popular co-operation, ends up by prostrating itself before the hoarder through its sheer helplessness to tackle him single-handed.

Between official bungling on the one hand and the hoarder's

greed on the other, and the rampant corruption among both, the people in the province have become playthings of prohibitive and violently fluctuating prices, occasional vanishing of food grains from the market and a quality of grain in the ration-shops which at times is unfit for human consumption.

The struggle against this intolerable situation and for people's food involves no subservience to officials. On the contrary the food campaign is a movement for solving the acutest social problem of the day, one on which the incompetence and bankruptcy of officialdom stands out more nakedly than any other issue in the country.

The food campaign by its very nature draws into its sweep the widest conceivable sections and parties of the people. Hence, far from being non-political it is the most powerful political mobilisation of the people possible in today's situation. A movement, which by its strength and volume bends the Government to change its entire policy on a basic popular question, which forces popular co-operation on it for bringing the hoarder to his knees so that the people may get food is patently a political movement.

The food movement is not "co-operation" with the Government in the sense in which the word is understood in patriotic ranks. It involves no association with the Government at the cost of the people or against their interest. On the contrary, food work is the greatest social service of the day, the biggest battle for reviving the morale and strength of the people.

The Congress in its long history of three generations has grown and gathered strength in the measure in which it has taken up and actually solved popular problems. Whenever in the course of such work it has had to associate itself with official efforts (e.g. the Bihar earthquake, work under the Congress ministries, etc.) the Congress has emerged not weaker but stronger from such association. The test is whether the issue taken up is of vital popular interest and whether official association based on popular mobilisation helps to solve it or not.

The truth, in fact, is the other way round. To sit with folded hands today and allow the people to starve and get famished is itself to hand them over to the agonies and humiliation of official high-handedness and the profiteer's insatiable greed. It is to be lost to the basic quality of all patriotism viz., to love and serve the people in their hour of need and

sorrow. It is to betray a woeful lack of confidence in the people and in the principle that whatever serves their interest must strengthen them and not the Government.

If the hoarder sits tight on his stocks, if the well-to-do peasant refuses to part with his grain for the urban consumer, if Punjab and U.P. refuse to feed starving Bengal and Malabar, if there are riots and civil war for food, if dacoities, mass destitution, disease and death are born out of the food crisis, even a blind man ought to see that it is not Government that is weakened. It is the ranks of the people that get divided and disrupted. It is they who lose all hope and become dehumanised. It is the faith of the people in the strength of the Congress and the League that is shaken to the roots.

THE STRUGGLE FOR FOOD AND FOR POWER

And the food campaign will and must win. Our country is not merely in grave danger of being ravaged by the Japanese fascist marauders. The enemy has already made serious inroads into our easternmost province. It is obvious that the sense of insecurity and panic created by the Japanese offensive and the strain put by it on the country's transport, lead to an increasing worsening of the food situation, and the latter, in its turn, by weakening popular morale, enhances the danger of foreign aggression.

It is incumbent upon Government today to face these problems. But neither of them is capable of effective solution excepting on the basis of popular co-operation. The more Government tries to bypass the people on these issues, the more and more does it turn them into a mess. The demand rises from all sides, in England, America and our own country, that Government must accept people's co-operation on questions that it has proved utterly unfit to solve by itself. A united people's movement, therefore, led by their mightiest organisations, viz., the Congress and the League, which comes forward positively and unequivocally to grapple with the food problem for the triple purpose of saving the people from starvation, building their morale, and defending our frontiers from aggression would leave government no choice but to come to terms with it step by step. And a government which has to co-operate with the people in this manner, has to concede to it national power.

The food movement will thus win both as a movement

for food and for power. The one thing needed is for Congressmen, Muslim Leaguers and all other patriots and patriotic organisations in the country to abandon their complacency and lack of confidence on the issue. The thing needed is for them boldly and unconditionally to declare that feeding the people is a patriotic cause and under no circumstances an "interest" of the Government; that the procurement, supply, distribution and price-control of food is a people's cause in the vital interests both of the peasant producer and urban consumer; that in making official plans of food control successful, we, far from obliging the Government are making it accept our co-operation in the interests of people's food.

The final thing necessary is for patriotic organisations to carry this message from village to village and town to town in the country, and unite the people into genuine popular committees for making food control a success.

Popular ineffectiveness on the food issue till now has not arisen because Government in no case, will allow popular intervention. It has arisen because our patriotic organisations, instead of rousing the people to a positive and confident solution of the question, have kept aloof from it in sullen discontent, or in timidity, or, if at all, intervened in a very feeble way lacking in self-confidence and hence failing to rouse and activate the mass of our countrymen.

From a negative to a constructive attitude, from sullen non-co-operation to active intervention, from separate and feeble to united and vigorous intervention, such is the key to the solution of the inseparable problems of food, national defence, and national government.

Bombay, 9th May, 1944.

S. G. SARDESAI.

POST SCRIPT

SUBSEQUENT TO the writing of the pamphlet certain developments have taken place in the province, the causes and effects of which can, in the absence of fuller information only be estimated in a broad way.

Since the last week of April, prices of grain has once again declined in U.P. The prices of wheat in the main assembling wholesale markets now range between 9-12-0 to 10-4-0 a

maund. Though not to the same extent, a certain decline has taken place in the retail markets as well.

The main reasons for the decline appear to be these. The sharp rise early in April brought about a substantial rush of wheat to the markets. Arrivals at Hapur rose to between 1,500 to 2,500 maunds a day. But having been seriously affected by the rains the quality of the new arrivals naturally was and continues to be very poor. In addition, according to most reports, Government have refrained from doing any substantial buying of the new harvest. In part this may be due to a feeling of confidence arising from the stocks already held by it, and in part, a deliberate policy to bring down prices by keeping off from the market since prices had already risen so high. Government have further declared their intention of not exporting any grain from the province during 1944. Resolutions on inter-district movements of grain by rail continues to be enforced as rigorously as before.

All these factors taken together can explain the renewed decline in prices. The fall in its turn has brought about a decline in arrivals at Hapur, which for a fortnight, have ranged between 400 to 600 maunds a day.

Though government agents have generally refrained from buying till now it does not mean that grain is staying with the original producers. In fact, a considerable amount of buying by rural traders and private traders in the wholesale markets is actually going on.

If the present tendency continues, a situation can develop before long when substantial quantities of grain will accumulate in the hands of private traders and either demand exorbitant prices from Government or dispose of their stocks in retail trade in the towns and villages.

Thus the fall in prices in no way alleviates the basic gravity of the situation. *The danger arising from the serious damage to crops remains, and the danger of the produce passing into the hands of profiteers to be used subsequently for price-racketeering also remains.*

How precisely the situation will develop during the next month cannot be asserted with certainty, but the temporary nature of the factors that have brought about an improvement, which again, is only apparent and not real, is quite clear.

S. G. S.
May 14, 1944.

I. THE BACKGROUND : THE OUTRAGEOUS COMPANIONSHIP OF HIGH PRICES AND PLENTY

How serious was the food problem in the United Provinces even before the recent rains? What was its most glaring expression?

The first thing in dealing with the question is not to compare U. P. with provinces like Bengal or Malabar.

Malabar and Bengal are normally deficit provinces. Last year, the factors of a real deficit, war danger and panic, pressure on transport, panicky and chaotic bureaucratic measures, and the exploitation of the whole situation by hoarders for their criminal greed and by political parties allied with them for their factional fights combined to operate with a violence and intensity in Bengal that could obviously be attained nowhere else in India.

U. P., on the contrary, is one of the granaries of our country. To measure the food problem in U. P. by the yardstick of Bengal is to make an entirely erroneous and misleading comparison.

HOW MUCH FOOD COULD THE PROVINCE SPARE ?

The basic factor of the food question is the resources of a province, i.e., its production and its needs.

What was the food situation in U. P. in 1943 arising from the produce of the *kharif* and *rabi* crops of 1942-43? How did it compare with the normal food resources of the province?

Statistics on the question are admittedly unsatisfactory. But we shall base our estimates on the most conservative data available.

The following table explains the point.

**U. P. GRAIN PRODUCTION IN 1942-43 COMPARED WITH
THE DECENNIAL PERIOD 1929-1939.***

(Department of Statistics and Economics, U. P. Govt.)

Crop	Yield	Excess (+) or shortage (-) compared to the ten year average from 1929-30 to 1938-39.
Rice	1839	+ 29.2
Wheat	2685	+ 3.2
Barley	1394	- 125
Jowar	641	- 153
Bajra	658	+ 275.4
Maize	946	+ 185.9
Gram	1911	+ 394.3
Total yield 1942-43	10,074	
Total excess over total average		916

Thus in 1942-43, the province produced nine lac tons of grain more than the average.

According to the Indian Trade Journal wheat and rice production in U. P. in 1942-43 was 27,24,000 and 18,58,000 tons respectively. In that case the excess production of these two grains over the average comes to a little over 42,000 and 48,000 tons respectively, and the total provincial excess rises from 916 to 974 thousand tons. Compared to the U. P. Government, the Indian Trade Journal is not likely to overestimate the crop yields of the province but we will take the lower figure for our calculation.

Naturally these 916,000 tons do not directly give us the exportable surplus from the province. To calculate that figure we have to see what addition they could make in 1943 to the normal exportable surplus of the province.

The following table gives the normal imports, exports and net exports from the province of important food grains, as estimated by the Provincial Government.

* Figures, as originally published, are given in thousands of tons. One ton is equal to 28 standard maunds.

**U. P. GRAIN EXPORTS AND IMPORTS (FIVE YEARS
AVERAGE UPTO 1942.)**

(In Thousands of Tons)

Grain	Export	Import	Net Export	Net Import
Wheat	167	83	84	—
Barley	Separate	figures	not available	—
Gram	104	10	94	—
Millets	71	19	52	—
Rice	25	199	—	174
Total	367	311	56	—

The normal net exports of wheat, gram, millets and rice from the province are thus 56,000 tons. The U. P. Government puts them down roughly as 60,000 tons, while the Food Grains Policy Committee, taking all grains together, estimates them at 69,000 tons. We shall take 56,000 tons as the real average export.

As already seen, the provincial grain production in 1942-43 was 916,000 above normal. The U. P. Government has stated that in 1943 they could not secure their normal import of rice, which is 174,000 tons. But the provincial rice production in the year itself was 29,000 tons above normal. So even assuming that no rice was imported in the year the province had to do without 145,000 tons of rice that would have been ordinarily imported. Deducting these from the excess produce of 916,000 tons we get an exportable surplus in 1943 of 771,000 tons in addition to the normal export of 56,000 tons.

The total exportable surplus of 1943 therefore works out at 827,000 tons.

Compared to this amount actually available for export, how much was actually sent out of the province in 1943 ?

Food grain export from U. P. in 1943 was almost completely under Government control. Official and private exports in 1943 according to officially published figures were 160,000 tons. The export figure given by the Weekly Market Review of Hapur* for the period from 1st January to 9th November 1942 is 20,55,791 maunds (73,427 tons). It is known that the Pro-

* Hapur and Lyallpur are the two leading wholesale wheat markets of the country. The review, which is considered extremely reliable by commercial circles is prepared by the Hapur Correspondent of the *Leader*, the *Pioneer*, the *Statesman*, *Commerce*, etc.

vincial Government expedited its exports during the last two months of 1943, but even so the Hapur review figure seems to be an under-estimate.

Government have published no figures of the amount purchased in the province for the army. But the maximum annual requirements of the army are given as 6,50,000 tons by the Food Grains Enquiry Committee and the major purchases of the army are made in the Punjab: It could not, therefore, have absorbed the whole or even the greater bulk left over after deducting the civilian exports of 1,60,000 tons from the exportable surplus of 8,27,000 tons i.e., the bulk of 6,67,000 tons.

IT IS CLEAR BEYOND ALL DOUBT, THEREFORE, THAT DESPITE CIVILIAN EXPORTS IN 1943 BEING 4½ TIMES THE NORMAL ANNUAL EXPORT, AND DESPITE ARMY PURCHASES THE ACTUAL BALANCE OF GRAIN LEFT IN U. P. IN 1943 WAS NOT LESS BUT GREATER THAN IN NORMAL YEARS.

HIGH PRICES STILL RULE

The essence of the food situation in U. P. in 1943 lay in the criminal contrast between the huge surplus of over six lac tons and the prohibitive prices that ruled for nearly six months of the year after the harvest and which even later exhibited only a partial decline.

A few figures will bring out the shocking nature of this contrast.

The following table gives the wholesale price of wheat at Hapur before the war and in 1943 and 1944.

WHOLESALE PRICES OF WHEAT AT HAPUR (In rupees per maund)

Month	1939	1943	1944
January	2-12-0	Statutory	11- 8-0
February	2-12-0	control ends	11- 6-9
March	2-10-0	in April	11- 0-6
April	2-14-0	10- 8-0	11- 9-0
May	2-12-0	13- 0-0	
June	2- 8-0	14- 8-0	
July	2- 9-6	14- 8-0	
August	2-11-0	14- 8-0	
September		14- 8-0	

Month	1939	1943	1944
October		13- 0-0	
November		11-12-0	
December		10- 8-0	

Two things in the table need special mention.

In 1943, prices rose to more than five times the level on the eve of the war.

In April this year, despite the decline noticeable since October last, the price was still higher than a year ago, and in addition displayed a tendency to rise.

Further, the Hapur Market report of 15th April stated that the prevailing rate in some districts was Rs. 16 a maund and that wheat prices were rising all over the province despite Government efforts to the contrary.

It must also be remembered that wheat prices in most parts of U. P. are higher than in Hapur which is in the centre of the main wheat growing region. For instance, towards Allahabad and Benares the high level mark of wholesale wheat prices reached Rs. 16 a maund.

With such wholesale prices it can be easily imagined that retail wheat prices in most cities rose to *between 16 to 19 rupees a maund or 2 seers 2 chhataks to a rupee, and their decline was both slower and later than that of wholesale prices.*

It is not necessary to go into the same detail in respect of all other grains since their tale follows the same course as wheat. The following summary table sums up the position in respect of other grains.

COMPARATIVE PRE-WAR AND 1943 PRICES OF OTHER MAJOR GRAINS

(in rupees per maund)

Grain	Price in August 1939	Highest in 1943	Number of months the highest level was maintained
Rice—Hapur	4-0-0	26-0-0	3 months
Jawar—Allahabad	2-8-0	13-0-0	2 months
Bajra—Allahabad	3-0-0	13-0-0	3 months
Arhar—Hapur	5-8-0	16-0-0	3 months
Gram—Hapur	3-0-0	12-8-0	1 month (above 10-0-0 for 6 months)

The price of rice is 6½ times above pre-war, of Jawar 5

times, of Bajra 4-1/3 times, of Arhar (tur) 3 times, of Gram 4 times!

And though these peak prices were maintained for a quarter of the year, almost the same level was maintained for months in addition. Again, these are wholesale and not retail prices!

On the question of prices, it is extremely instructive to make another comparison. No epithet was too sharp for describing the greed of Punjab hoarders during 1943. The entire nationalist press and patriotic opinion was agreed on this question. And yet comparative prices in U. P. and the Punjab make the startling revelation, that U. P. prices put Punjab prices absolutely in the shade!

It is needless to comment on the following table which tells the story in self-explanatory figures.

COMPARATIVE PRICES

U. P. (HAPUR) AND PUNJAB (LYALLPUR)

(in rupees per maund)

	August 1943		December 1943	
	Punjab	U.P.	Punjab	U.P.
Wheat	10-11-0	14- 8-0	10-12-0	10- 8-0 (now 11/12)
Rice	17- 8-0	26- 0-0	15- 8-0	16- 0-0
Jowar	8- 0-0	13- 0-0)	Allah- 7- 4-0	7-12-0) Allah-
Bajra	7- 0-0	13- 0-0)	abad 8- 0-0	9- 8-0) abad.
Gram	9- 7-0	10- 8-0	8- 4-0	10- 0-0

Such, in simple outline, is the shocking contrast between the supply situation and price-level in U. P.

EPIDEMICS AND OTHER EXTREME RESULTS OF ACUTE STARVATION

In September and October last, when the situation was at its worst, stray death of beggars were reported from Cawnpore and Benares. Report of some elements of the poorest sections in the rural areas living on jack-fruit seeds, roots and herbs also were received from the Eastern districts.

Equally grave was the warning in September when between the first and the second week deaths from cholera shot up from 292 to 4141! Later, the situation improved but the latest figures for plague, cholera and small-pox are also a warning in embryo.

ATTACKS AND DEATHS FROM EPIDEMICS IN U. P.

	11-3-44 to 18-3-44		18-3-44 to 25-3-44	
	Seizures	Deaths	Seizures	Deaths
Plague	202	155	231	204
Small-pox	300	43	222	46
Cholera	32	8	22	13

The effects of the recent rains are obviously not yet reflected in the period covered by these figures.

EFFECTS OF RAIN AND HAILSTORM

On the top of this situation has come the catastrophe of rains and hail.

The full effects of the calamity are yet not known. The Eastern districts have suffered most, but extensive damage has occurred in the central districts also. Both the standing and harvested crops as also fodder have been damaged and destroyed. Non-official reports received till now do not put the loss at below 50% of the crop in the affected areas. Even if these estimates happen to be somewhat exaggerated the damage done makes a vital change in the provincial food situation this year compared to the last. According to the view expressed by the Governor, the loss suffered is "undoubtedly widespread and in some districts very serious." Some districts are already facing near-famine conditions.

Even before the actual amount of damage done could be calculated criminal price-racketeering was begun both in urban and rural areas. Wheat prices have risen overnight by a seer or more per rupee, e.g., from 3 seers 12 chhataks to 2 seers 10 chhataks in Lucknow, and in Jhansi to 2 seers 4 chhataks.

Spontaneous mass deputations of peasants numbering hundreds to District Magistrates demanding total remission of rent, *taqavi*, and suspension of the collection of war loans took place in Cawnpore, Allahabad, and Lucknow after the rains. Afraid of further developments Government have banned even private meetings in the latter two districts under Section 56, D.I.R.

It is clear that the prospects for 1944 are far darker than 1943.

U. P. MUST FEED THE NEEDY PROVINCES

No examination of the food question in U. P. from a patriotic point of view is possible without a full recognition of the duty of the province not merely to feed itself but to send out every grain of surplus to Bengal and other provinces in the country.

For Congressmen and Muslim Leaguers, in particular, to fail to strain every nerve to help the suffering provinces with the maximum amount of food is to deny the very purpose of the Congress and the League. It is to grant the dire need of our brother countrymen in words and deny it in practice.

Last year's food record of the province was deplorable not merely because it failed to feed its own population at reasonable prices from its plentiful supplies, but also because, when millions died in Bengal it failed to offer them the big surplus it could easily afford and which it was its duty to provide. The recent destruction of crops does not relieve the province of this responsibility. On the contrary, it obliges it to strain itself harder to garner all its food resources to export whatever is possible after the satisfaction of internal needs.

Such are the food situation, the prospects and the responsibilities of 1944. The people of the province enter the new crop year after the heavy economic strain of a whole year of intolerable prices, and with their physical capacities considerably taxed and weakened. They enter it with a material part of the new crop destroyed and under the threat of an alarming rise in prices. They enter it with the spread of epidemics looming in the background. The situation if not controlled cannot but drift towards serious famine and starvation. The only way out is united patriotic intervention.

II. THE EXPLANATION : THE FOOD THIEF AS THE CUSTODIAN OF PEOPLE'S FOOD

COMMON BELIEF virtually holds official food control measure alone responsible for the food debacle. Scarcity and high price arise because Government purchase too much grain either for the army or for export and because they attempt to control prices and movements of grain which create panic and a feeling of insecurity among the people and dislocate the grain trade. This is the sum and substance of the popular understanding of the question.

Together with this, hoarding by the peasant and the consumer, and inflation are also pointed out as causes that contribute to worsen the situation. In principle, the necessity of controlling prices, supply and distribution is definitely accepted far more this year than last. The role of trader-hoarders, which was altogether denied before the tragedy of Bengal, is also more clearly seen now.

But all the same, the basic opinion continues that the existing government cannot and will not operate food control successfully and in the interests of the people, with the result that in actual practice the attitude taken towards control is either one of helpless resignation or various degrees of negation and opposition.

The actual history of the issue during 1943 alone can clarify the truth and bring out the relative importance and mutual connection of the factors that jointly brought so much misery to the people.

FOOD TRADE UNDER NORMAL TIMES

A picture of the position of the peasant and the trader in the supply and distribution of food grains in normal times is necessary for an understanding of the events of 1943. We shall take the case of wheat as the most important and representative food grain.

The holding of the average peasant in the United Provinces is only 2½ acres, the smallest in India. The average holding in the Eastern parts of the province is smaller than in the

West, where wheat growing districts are mainly concentrated.

The proportion of his produce marketed by the peasant naturally varies with the size of the average holding. Hence, whereas in the West as much as 60% is disposed of by sale, in the East the proportion does not seem to be above 40 (Report on Marketing of Wheat in India, by the Agricultural Marketing Adviser, Government of India, 1936.)

How many and who are the peasants who have to dispose of their surplus immediately after the harvest? The same report says,

“the varying degrees of indebtedness cause most of the cultivators to hand over varying proportions of their grain to creditors soon after the harvest. Enquiries in Delhi (adjacent to Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur, the districts of the most concentrated wheat production in U.P., Hapur being situated in Meerut) showed that 1/3 of those questioned parted with practically all their wheat.... in payment of debt, and 40% had no surplus at all to sell.”

This would indicate that peasants who can withhold the disposal of their surplus are not above 27 per cent of the cultivators. Naturally in the Eastern parts it would be decidedly smaller.

What proportions of the wheat actually marketed are handled by the various selling agencies? In the West, nearly 1/3 of the produce is taken to the market by the cultivator himself, about the same by the village baniya, and the rest by other trading agencies and bigger zamindars. In the East, the share of the cultivator is much smaller.

As soon as all this produce reaches the wholesale assembling *mandies* (like Hapur, Shamli, Chandosi, etc.) it is taken over by the *katcha arhatiyas* who function as the agents of the *pucca arhatiyas* who are the real wholesale traders and stockists. From the *Pucca Arhatiyas* in the assembling centres grain passes to their opposites in the big consuming centres and then through the retail traders to the final consumer. Between 80 to 85% of the total wheat trade passes through the hands of the *Pucca Arhatiyas*.

This bare outline of how wheat journeys from the producer to the consumer shows the grip which the trader has over the bulk of grain even in the western regions where the average peasant is better off than in the east. It also shows how soon grain passes into his hands after harvesting is over.

HISTORY OF 1943

The forces that came violently to a head in 1943 were already operating since the beginning of the war, and matured very fast in 1942.

The arrival of the Japanese on the borders of India, the wholesale arrests of national leaders and the banning of the Congress after the A.I.C.C. session in Bombay, fast growing inflation, and the utterly chaotic and conflicting measures adopted by the Central and Provincial Governments were the main factors that rapidly worsened the food situation at the close of 1942, creating a condition that was fully exploited by traders for rampant speculation, hoarding, black-marketing and for reducing price-control to a pure fiction and mockery.

Nowhere in nationalist ranks, however, was the situation seen in this light when the food crisis burst on the country at the close of 1942. It was not only believed that the sole reason of the vanishing of food from the market was due to official purchases and export. People were so blind to the deliberate hoarding of stocks by profiteers that the general popular demand of the time was that Government must give up all control over the prices, movement and supply of grain. The dominant feeling was that the moment this was done prices would fall and food reappear in the market.

The first lie to this belief was given in January 1943 when control over the price of wheat was abolished by the Government of India. Immediately on the lifting of control (the controlled price was Rs. 5-4-0 a maund) price shot up to between 9 to 12 rupees a maund! Obviously there was something deeper behind high prices and vanishing of stocks than Government control.

The U. P. Government, however, did not abolish price-control despite the action taken by the Central Government. On the contrary it came out with a statement in February expressing alarm at the rise in prices outside the province following on the withdrawal of price-control, and proposed a scheme for procurement, the continuation of price-control and introduction of rationing "with a view to alleviate the distress caused to the members of the public due to the non-availability of food stuffs."

The procurement price fixed by the Government under this scheme was Rs. 8|- a maund and the entire machinery of purchase was to be manned by traders. The vital fault and weak-

ness of the scheme, which finally proved its undoing, was that it made no provision whatever for popular participation in its operation nor guaranteed a minimum price to the peasant. But the purchase price of Rs. 8|- offered to the traders was very attractive not merely in comparison with the pre-war level (2-11-0 a maund) but even as compared with the level at the close of 1942 (6-11-0 a maund). The traders, who wanted an honest and decent rate of profit, could have no complaint against it of any kind.

THE FIRST CRIMINAL CONSPIRACY

And yet, despite this extremely compromising deal which the Government offered them, what was the reaction of the wheat kings of Hapur to the official scheme?

The Hapur Market Review, to which reference has already been made, gives the reply (dated 12-2-43). On the eve of its publication, and anticipating it, the review says:

“Responsible trade circles emphatically maintain that unless the control (on prices) is removed and other restrictions withdrawn, the Government's hope of acquiring large quantities of wheat in the coming season and releasing them on the market as and when they like is bound to fail.”

A more bare-faced demand for absolute and unbridled profiteering could not be made. A clearer declaration of their policy of deliberately pushing up prices and withholding stocks could not be made by traders. A more frank confession that the usual rise in prices and vanishing of goods that follow control measures are not caused by those measures but are deliberately manipulated by the trader-hoarders to blow up price-control, procurement and rationing, could not be given.

And as if this declaration was not enough, the proof of actual practice immediately followed. The mere publication of the official scheme (it was to come into operation at the end of March 1943) was enough for stocks to dry up at Hapur.

The Market Review of February 26th says

“In the absence of the decontrolling of prices, as in the Punjab (!), it is useless (!!) to expect increased arrivals in the markets.”

It must be noted that there could be no question of the peasant, even the better peasant, withholding grain in February,

the fag-end of the wheat season. The new crop does not come to the market until the beginning of April. The "famine" in the market at this time could, therefore, be nothing but a demand by the wheat trade for an unqualified surrender by Government to it "as in the Punjab (sic)!"

The United Provinces Chamber of Commerce, and The Merchants Chamber of United Provinces also clearly indicated their opposition to the scheme by calling it "impracticable" "one that would nullify its fundamentals," and so on, though they did not demand its withdrawal as bluntly as the wheat trade of Hapur. The Merchants Chamber also stated that despite the scheme, the village cultivator, bania and zamindar would not bring grain to the market!

THE DREAMWORLD OF THE OFFICIALS

What was the official reaction to this, criminal but unquestionably powerful challenge of the Hapur magnates and the merchant community of the province?

Did the Government go to the people at least to explain to them how its scheme alone could give them cheap and sufficient food? Did it say how price-control, procurement and rationing were the means to that end? Did it offer the actual cultivator a minimum price? Did it at least take the warning that the provisions of its paper scheme and the offered price of eight rupees a maund were by themselves too important a guarantee of the success of the scheme?

It did nothing of the kind. It just went on publishing more and more details of the scheme which brought it no further strength whatever.

Finally, after plenty of trumpeting, the procurement part of the scheme was launched on 25th March. It provided that from that day all grain arriving in the cities would be purchased by Government agents only and after accumulating stocks in this manner for a month full-fledged rationing in twenty-five leading cities of the province would be introduced about the end of April!

What the earlier policy and declarations of the mercantile community had made amply clear, and which Government had refused to heed, was precipitated from the very day of the introduction of the scheme.

Almost complete vanishing of grain in towns and cities occurred immediately after the 25th. Grain ceased to arrive

both in the assembling mandies and the consuming cities and towns. With patriotic slogans on their lips and mass starvation as their weapon, the province-wide strike of the profiteers began!

Sedulous propaganda was started in the rural areas for which trader-hoarders and fifth column elements alone could be responsible that grain should not be sold to Government agents as it would all be sent out of the province or used for the army; that the only purpose of price-control was to secure cheap stocks for the army and of rationing to starve the city population. Peasants were asked not to accept currency notes in payment for the grain sold by them. In a year of remarkably bumper crop, villages were asked not to sell their grain in the name of village self-sufficiency. At a time when grain had vanished from the cities and huge throngs of hungry people roamed the streets in panic and desperation, it was propagated that the dispatch of grain to urban areas was a help to Government and hence it was the patriotic duty of the peasant to hold fast to his produce. No honest Congressman could possibly believe these to be Congress slogans. Only the greediest profiteer and a fifth column enemy of the people working for civil war, bloodshed and chaos in the name of patriotism could popularise them. But they were disseminated most violently all over the province immediately the scheme was put into force.

Confronted by the most artificial of famines and the danger of mass rioting and disorder, the Government swung from easy confidence to panic. A hasty statement announcing a complete retreat was published on April 16th, and the grand scheme planning to solve the colossal food problem of five crores of people without their co-operation was unceremoniously shelved. Except for the ban on exports from the province all food control now came to an end. Price-control, procurement, rationing, everything was abandoned.

Three things stand out from the fate met by the scheme.

First, the people had nothing to lose and everything to gain if the scheme which intended to control prices, procure stocks and introduce rationing had become successful. The worst sufferers from its collapse were the people themselves.

Second, the scheme failed because due to their fear of the people Government did not come forward to co-operate with them against the trader-hoarder who was the arch-criminal

who blew it up and to whose pressure Government had to finally succumb.

Third, precisely because Government wanted to but were helpless to operate the scheme in the teeth of the hoarders' opposition, if the people had taken the bold initiative of coming forward to enforce price-control, procurement and rationing, Government would have had to come to terms with them in the defence of the scheme itself.

The basic reason of the collapse, therefore, lay in the failure of the patriotic parties to mobilise the people for enforcing such co-operation on the Government.

In essence, this means that popular interest and strength in the situation did not lie in taking an oppositional or neutral attitude towards the scheme. It lay in supporting it and making it a success on the basis of popular initiative and positive intervention. Failing to do this, only the people suffered, only they were weakened and felt still further depressed and helpless.

No commentary on the issue is more significant and eloquent than the fact that immediately the scheme was withdrawn the Council of the United Provinces Merchants Chamber "*gratefully thanked the Government of U.P. on their wise decision to withdraw price-control measures.*" (Annual Report of the Chamber for 1943).

Grateful thanks for a decision which, within the twinkling of an eye, allowed prices to rise from 4 seers to 2¼ seers a rupee! Something for every patriot to ponder over!

SECOND SURRENDER: GOVERNMENT'S FOOD POLICY SINCE MAY, 1943

The history of food in the province since the collapse of the April scheme, considered in its essence, is not different than the earlier period.

The lesson Government drew from their failure was not that they should have secured the co-operation of the people to fight the hoarder. The lesson they drew was that their methods of tackling the question had been too drastic and comprehensive. It was wrong to deal with the hoarder so roughly. That only made matters worse. The correct policy was to bring him round gently and persuasively. The lion should not be caught by the mane but coaxed into submission!

Now, therefore, Government decided to make a second beginning. The new "plan" (really, absence of any plan) was to begin by purchasing stocks from the traders at any price demanded by them and without attempting to introduce rationing until sufficient stocks accumulated in Government hands through such purchases. The theory was that with the accumulation of stocks Government would be in a position to offer a continually diminishing price to the traders, gradually introduce and extend rationing to a growing section of the urban population and also lower the prices at which it would sell grain in the ration shops. It was also claimed that the extension of rationing and the reduction of prices in ration shops would be a further pressure on private traders to release their stocks and lower prices. It goes without saying that the new scheme made no provision for statutory price control.

In actual fact, between September last year and today, Government have done all the three things they set out to do. Until July 1943 they purchased grain at any price charged by the traders. From then onwards, they began fixing the ceiling prices at which they were prepared to buy and gradually reduced these prices with the passage of time. For instance, the ceiling price of wheat was brought down from 13-8-0 a maund in July to 10-8-0 a maund by December. Rationing which began in September with 25% of the poorest population in 25 cities, has now been extended to cover 70% (and in some cases 80%) of the population of 37 cities and towns. Wheat prices in ration shops, again to give one illustration, have been reduced from 2 seers 12 chhataks a rupee to 3½ seers in the Eastern (Benares) Zone and 4½ seers in the Western (Meerut) Zone.

Similarly, between October last year and before the recent rains there was a general decline in food grain prices in the retail and wholesale markets in the province. Roughly the decline was from the range of 12 to 16 rupees a maund (according to the nature of the grain) to 8 to 12 rupees a maund.

But the two questions to consider in this connection are these. First of all, at least till the recent damage, Government considered the price-level in the province and the food situation in general to be perfectly satisfactory. They claimed that the profiteer had been successfully compelled to sell his stocks to the people at reasonable prices. And secondly, they took the credit of the so-called achievement to themselves, to what they claimed was the most effective and practical way

of solving the problem of procurement, distribution, and price-control. Were the two claims correct?

There can be no doubt that the decision of Government to make a second effort at procurement and rationing despite their first failure was correct. There is no doubt, again, that the fact of Government being in possession of stocks and operating a system of partial rationing must have had some effect on prices.

With all that, a proper examination of the question would disclose that basically, both the official claims are wrong. The price decline between October 1943 and March 1944 was not at all satisfactory, and whatever decline took place was due to causes of which the Government policy of purchase and rationing was a very minor one.

The trader-hoarder has dominated Government's second food scheme as effectively as he blew up its first one. He continues to dominate the food situation in the province.

What are the facts to prove this contention?

PRICE CONTROL OR LOOT ?

To begin with the very basis of Government's new procurement policy, was the complete acceptance of the profiteers' demand.

Government's first scheme broke down because the trader-profitteer insisted that he must either be given the unrestricted right of selling grain to Government and the people at whatever prices he wanted or else grain would not come to the market at all. *The Government's entry into the market on the basis of the abolition of price-control was an unqualified acceptance of this demand.*

What this surrender meant in practice was demonstrated clearly during the immediate months that followed. Government invited tenders and bought right and left at any price asked for by the traders. According to one of the biggest wholesalers in Allahabad and now the leading Government purchasing agent, there was no question during this period of competition between traders. Whatever quantity at whatever price was offered was accepted. Tenders were accepted at some places even at Rs. 18 per maund! On the same authority, during this period Government policy led to the profit of the village merchant rising from between one to two annas a maund to eight annas a maund. *The kaccha arhatiya*

increased his income from an anna to anywhere between 8 to 12 annas a maund. Finally the *Pucca Arhatiya* on the average made at least 2 to 3 rupees where formerly he made only upto 2 annas per maund.

It is also extremely significant, as the Hapur Market Review points out, that despite this most unjustifiable rise, wheat arrivals at Hapur and many other *mandies* were very poor till July. Only in August, when, for reasons which will be explained later, the traders began to feel that a further pushing up of prices was impossible, did stocks begin to arrive in large quantities.

Such was the story during this period of wheat which had passed the peasants' hands at 9 to 10 rupees a maund reaching Government at anywhere upto Rs. 16 a maund and the urban consumer at 2 seers and 4 chhataks a rupee. This was how between April and July, the average price level rose from 10 to 14 rupees a maund.

After following this practice till July, Government went over from the system of inviting tenders to that of appointing certain traders as Government's purchasing agents. That system continues to this day. How has profiteering flourished under the new system?

According to current opinion in Hapur, which for obvious reasons is not publicly expressed, the profit of the independent wholesaler at present ranges between 25 to 50½ per annum and of Government agents between 100 to 200%. Opinion in the Allahabad *mandi* is the same.

It is common knowledge at Hapur that the local Government agent has quadrupled his capital in 1943 (really in six months), and one firm of Government agents in Cawnpore has earned 50 lacs during the same period! An "honest" Government agent now makes about eight times the profit he made as a private trader in pre-war years!

Secondly, the profits referred to till now are those made through the official procurement machinery. It must be borne in mind that due to the free market still continuing in U.P. the profits made by wholesalers and retailers who supply the vast market in the rural areas and the unrationed sections of the urban population are a separate field of profiteering altogether. This fact is still further underlined when it is known that rural retail prices in U.P. are generally ¼ of a seer higher than urban prices and that due to the unsatisfactory quality of grain offered in the ration shops, anywhere between 25 to

50% of the rationed population also purchases its requirements from the open market!

Thirdly, the profiteer has prostituted the official food system still further both by adulterating the grain supplied and giving short weight stocks. Plenty of stocks have been moth eaten. Moist and fungus grown grain has been equally common. The proportion of chaff, bits of straw and other waste material, particularly in rice, is very high:

It is an open secret at Hapur that each Government khatti (a cellar containing 750 maunds of wheat) really contains 50 maunds less as the weight of the wheat contained in it is increased to that extent by moistening the stocks supplied to Government!

Criminal practices like this combined with bad storage in which also the traders are directly interested have led to serious damage and in cases to stocks becoming utterly rotten and unfit for consumption.

It is not difficult to imagine that the same hoarders who adulterate stocks supplied to Government use the bad quality of grain in the ration shops as a weapon for prejudicing people against rationing, as a means for inducing ration-card holders not to purchase from ration shops but from private ones, and generally for discrediting the very ideas of rationing, price-control and procurement.

In a system in which the profiteer himself is put in possession of the procurement mechanism, widespread corruption is inevitable and does not need to be proved. Government have failed to check it for the same reason as their basic failure in respect of food control itself, viz., refusing to seek popular co-operation for putting down corruption.

Such is Government's achievement in the matter of checking profiteering and hence, too, in keeping prices at a reasonable level. Could the situation have been materially worse even without the Government's so-called control?

THE STOCK SITUATION

From the question of prices we will pass to the question of stock control.

The U.P. Government have consistently declared that their stock position is as sound as could be desired, if not better. After the hectic buying during May, June and July last, Government have often suspended their purchases for long periods.

Now, first of all, considering the literally uncontrolled prices offered by Government to the hoarders, there is nothing to boast of or be satisfied over having secured stocks. At the price dictated by the trader-hoarder, anyone could have secured grain.

The responsibility of the public authority is not merely to secure grain. It is to secure grain of the proper quality and at reasonable prices so that the people may get enough, cheap and good food. It is no procurement policy which does not keep all the three objectives in view.

The policy of the U.P. Government really boils down to this that hoarders have permitted the officials to put the label "Government owned stocks" on their own stocks. And Government pats itself on the back for being allowed to do so.

Even in this manner, however, what is the amount procured by Government? Government are usually extremely reluctant to publish information on the question. But the following figures have been recently supplied. They are for all grains together.

	Tons
Grain exported in 1943	160,000
In hand at the end of the year	210,900
Consumed for internal rationing (estimate)	60,000
Total	430,900

According to the figures quoted earlier, total grain production in U.P. in 1942-43 was over a crore tons. Taking 35% of this, at a conservative rate, as the marketable amount, Government did not purchase, even after following a policy of unconditional appeasement of the hoarder, more than 12.5% of the marketable amount.

If the hoarder keeps to himself 87.5% of the marketable grain and sells 12.5% to Government at the prices he demands, who dominates the price and stock situation in the province?

Even to put the question is to give the reply. But Government have never posed the question that way. It would not suit them to do so.

RATIONING

The preceding facts taken together clearly show how the partial rationing system of Government is really under the thumb of the trader-hoarders.

The first basis of the U.P. rationing system is that it is the traders who really determine the prices of official stocks and not Government that dictates prices to the traders.

The second basis is that the free market is not closed to the profiteer. On the contrary, by adulterating stocks supplied to Government he draws customers away from the ration shops to his private shop.

In simple essence, this means that so long as the traders feel that the highest profits can be made by selling stocks to Government, they do so, and rationing functions. But the moment they feel that still greater profiteering is possible by withholding stocks from Government and selling them in the open market, they take to that course and rationing is brought into jeopardy.

This is exactly the situation which has arisen since the recent destruction of crops. In the new situation, when Government ceiling prices are between 10 to 11 rupees a maund and market prices above 16 rupees a maund, it is futile to expect that traders are going to offer their stocks to Government agents, in the absence of real popular pressure.

He who controls prices and stocks, controls rationing. That is the truth.

This situation again proves more than anything else how rationing is a genuine popular need ; how it means cheap, good and enough food for the people and particularly for the poor ; and, how the trader-profiteer is the party which is interested in blowing up rationing.

WHY FALL IN PRICES ?

After understanding the preceding facts the hollowness of Government's claim to have brought down prices by their unique food "control" measures stands clearly exposed. But still, the causes of the decline after October must also be positively stated.

The most amusing thing in this connection is that at Hapur the mention of this claim of Government among trading circles only calls forth a sneer! The reasons for the decline commonly given at Hapur are these. Their simplicity and obviousness contrast vividly with the Government's obscure claims.

(1) The rise in prices till September was itself extremely artificial in view of the huge surplus of 1942-43. Prices rose because Government was prepared to purchase stocks at the

price demanded. Merchants were only concerned with profits according to the slogan, "business is business."

(2) Prices could have risen still higher only if the provincial export ban (which was never lifted in U.P.) had been lifted. Until July, merchants had a hope that the U.P. Government also would be forced to accept the free trade policy then being followed by the Central Government. But when in July they found that on the contrary it was the Central Government that returned to the policy of control, they began to feel that it was no use withholding stocks in the hope of free exports from the province.

(3) After the Food Grains Policy Committee report published in September it became clearer still that the Central Government would press for an effective control of prices, total rationing and procurement by provincial governments and that there would be a tightening of the machinery of control in general. This destroyed the last lingering hopes of the victory of free trade.

(4) The *kharif* harvest of 1943 was exceptionally good.

(5) Release of more shipping created the possibility of substantial imports from Australia.

(6) As a result of the preceding factors taken together, hoarded wheat was released from September onward and prices naturally fell.

As the Hapur Market Review of November 12, 1943, states in a few words "*it would, therefore, be apparent that without Government intervention prices would have declined in the ordinary course.*"

Rather blunt, but quite clear and simple!

Later in December 1943 and January 1944, the Hapur Wheat Review repeatedly refers to the "very unusual phenomenon of large arrivals in the market in the winter months" adding, rather drily, "*stored wheat is getting rusted and insect bitten in large quantities and holders are anxious to clear that off.*" (4-12-43).

The Hapur Market Review does not merely blow up the official claims.

It also gives a death blow to the theory that prices rose during April to September because of army purchases and exports from the province. Only a magician could perform the trick of releasing in Hapur in December stocks which had vanished from the province six months earlier!

Such is the story of official defeat and the trader-profiteers' triumph in 1943.

In the end, it may be stated, that even Government at bottom is quite aware of who is the master and who plays the second fiddle on the food front in U.P.

In an official note reviewing Government's own food policy, the inadvertent admission is given, that "lowering of prices, whether of purchase or sale (i.e. ration shops prices) by Government is done only when "the general market is expected to follow such a lead," and that "official prices cannot be lowered unless the general market shows a tendency to follow such a lead." The confession comes straight from the horse's mouth!

Government's entire food control policy even after May, can therefore be summed up as follows :—

(1) Its price policy, both in respect of purchase and sale, is dictated by the hoarder. Its claim of "leading the market down" is basically untenable.

(2) Its procurement policy, i.e., the amount and quality of stocks to be purchased, the time of their purchase, their storage, and above all the mechanism of purchase, are completely in the hands of the hoarder.

(3) Its rationing policy, i.e., the quantity of grain in ration shops, the percentage of population to be covered by rationing, and mainly, the fact that it refuses to introduce total rationing, —all these are clearly dictated by the hoarders' interest.

(4) In refusing to institute statutory price-control, a procurement policy based on co-operation with the peasant and total rationing, it is following a policy against popular interest, and in favour of the profiteer.

(5) Government's blunder has not been that it has not wanted to procure stocks, control prices and introduce rationing. It has wanted all the three things.

Its guilt has been failure to co-operate with the people which has continually driven it to bungling and playing into the profiteers' hands. The profiteer-hoarder, on the contrary, has consciously tried to blow up procurement, price control, and rationing altogether, or if that could not be done, to dominate over all the three spheres of food control by hook or by crook, openly or covertly.

It is vitally necessary to understand this difference of attitude between Government and the profiteer towards food

control to realise how and why popular mobilisation to solve the food question constructively must compel Government to accept popular intervention.

Such is the history of food in U.P. during 1943 and upto the recent rains.

It is a clear record of official bungling and callousness, and of immense social suffering arising from the food thief having become the custodian of people's food.

Finally, it is also a record of Congressmen and Muslim Leaguers standing paralysed in the face of the food crisis, not because they did not feel for the people, but because they failed to see that not non-co-operation but confident intervention to make price-control, procurement and rationing successful was the real path of serving the people and putting an end to official bungling and the profiteers' greed.

III. THE PROGRAMME FOR A FOOD CAMPAIGN

It was in this background of falling prices and the expectation of a record harvest that the rains came in March and April. Overnight they transformed the situation from one of falling to steeply rocketing prices, and a bumper harvest to a threatened deficit for the province as a whole.

Further, since the middle of April, in accordance with the decision of the Central Government, the Provincial Government has reimposed statutory price-control in wholesale markets after a whole year's experiments in controlling prices without that measure.

It remains now to see how exactly these new factors have affected the situation, and to work out the programme and policy of a people's food campaign in the light of the situation as it stands now.

The total amount of damage caused by the rains is not known, and it must be recognised, cannot even be approximately calculated by any non-official agency. There is not the slightest doubt that it is far in excess of the official estimate. At the same time it must be remembered that the yield of the *kharif* crops of 1943 (figures of which have not been published) was exceptionally good and that the rice crop of 1943 yielded 18,72,000 tons (Indian Trade Journal, 30-3-44) i.e. 62,000 tons above normal. It would be wrong and harmful both to over-estimate or underestimate the harm done.

Under the circumstances the main danger arising from the new situation is of panicky and alarmist steps being taken by all the parties concerned leading to a tragic worsening of an already serious situation. The main task is to secure the full mobilisation and just distribution of the food resources of the province not less but more because of the destruction of a part of the crop.

REACTIONS TO THE SITUATION

How is the new situation seen by the various parties concerned? Certain spontaneous reactions to the situation are already being noticed.

(1) **THE PEASANT:** The spontaneous reaction on the

peasant mind seems to be to hold on to his produce with all his strength. Since the bulk of the rural population, i.e., the labourers and poor peasants cannot do this however they might try, the only result will be the accumulation of grain in the hands of the well-to-do and rich peasants, the zamindars, and the village bania and money lender.

What will be the consequences of such a development?

Starvation for the rural poor in the near future, and later, when official stocks get depleted, the same fate for urban areas as well. Strikes, disturbances, rioting, epidemics, these also will follow in the wake threatening serious disruption of urban life. The people are already suffering from a shortage of cloth and other manufactured goods due to the crisis in industry. Workers' strikes will be the last straw to bring about the complete break down of industry.

The danger of the depletion of Government stocks leading to the scope of rationing being restricted is serious. Government stocks at the beginning of the year were 2,10,000 tons and the rationed population nearly 45 lacs. If all the rationed population were to consume its full quota, these stocks could last for about four months. As stated earlier, a substantial part of card-holders were not drawing their rations in the past. But with the new rise in prices they are bound to do so. By all reports, Government have not done any substantial buying this year. According to press reports, magistrates of deficit districts like Allahabad and Benares have already expressed anxiety regarding their stock position.

Thus, if in addition to the serious destruction of crops already caused by the rains, the village rich and the traders resort to hoarding on an extensive scale in 1944, nothing short of mass famine stares the cities and the poor elements in the rural areas within a period of three to four months. Particularly acute will be the crisis in cities, with the gravest effects on the entire life of the province, considering that the number and average size of cities in U.P. is much larger than any other province in India.

(2) THE CONGRESSMAN: The spontaneous reaction in Congress ranks though not actually voiced is in favour of total remission of rent and revenue, as also *taqavi* loans and advances for seed in the affected areas. The mass of Congressmen are sufficiently conscious of the gravity of the situation to call on the peasant to sit tight on his grain. But unless a call is issued by responsible leaders, they will not actively

help to mobilise the food resources in the villages for feeding the rural poor and for supplying the needs of the urban population. They will not call on the peasant to sell his surplus grain to official purchasing agents as his primary patriotic duty to his brethren living in the cities.

What will be the result ?

On the one hand, the village trader, the zamindar and the rich peasant will take full advantage of the fact that they are not being branded as unpardonable enemies of the people. They will be thankful that their rampant profiteering and fleecing the poor peasant of his produce can go on unchecked. Far from patriotic opinion in the rural areas being roused against them, profiteers and blood suckers will parade as patriots fighting the alien Government "by not selling grain to its agents." On the other hand, Government, already fearful about the prospects of its procurement plans coming to naught will resort to coercive measures thus causing still further demoralisation and helplessness among the people and leading to still greater hoarding in rural areas.

(3) **THE OFFICIAL :** Official reaction to the situation as witnessed till now has already been mainly one of alarm. On the one hand the sale of Defence Savings Certificates has been abandoned so far as the *rabi* harvest is concerned. Some relief in rent and revenue and through *taqavi* and seed loans has been promised. At the same time, afraid of further demands being raised by the peasantry, section 56 of the D.I.R. banning all meetings is being applied in district after district and a number of arrests have already taken place.

What is going to be the result of this policy ?

It is going to drive the peasant straight into the arms of the very persons who want to blow up the entire price-control, procurement, and rationing scheme. Government policy is a clear provocation to the peasant not to sell his grain, and at any rate, not to sell it at the controlled price to the Government agent. Its one effect will be to alienate the peasant completely from food control and drive him to various forms of resistance. *Government could not wreck its food plans more effectively than by persisting in the policy of refusing to give the peasantry all the relief demanded by the havoc caused by the rains and of gagging every voice that asks for proper relief.*

If it persists in its present policy, once again, as during last year, Government will have to end up by abolishing price

control and agreeing to purchase stocks from the traders at prices demanded by them.

THE CRIMINAL GANG AGAIN

That the same sinister anti-popular forces that robbed the people last year are preparing to exploit the new situation for their selfish ends has already become clear.

The official controlled price of wheat in the wholesale markets of surplus districts is at the moment Rs. 10-4-0 per maund. Prices in the deficit districts are fixed a little higher. Gram and barley prices are 8|10 and 7|10 of wheat prices. Coarse rice is Rs. 13-8-0 a maund.

But despite this statutory control, what is the reality? Prices of wheat in most districts are already above Rs. 16-8-0 a maund. Government is unable to enforce its own orders.

The meaning of the situation is amply clear.

Once again, as last year, Government purchasing agents are going to face it with a strike. They are going to insist that Government must either offer much higher prices if it wants to procure stocks or else stocks cannot be secured at all.

And the quality of grain offered this year is going to be far worse than the last. The deterioration caused by the rains is going to be a pretext for the most shameless adulteration of the stocks supplied to Government.

If the hoarders are exploiting the situation for economic gain certain erstwhile Congressmen now openly following a programme denounced by Gandhiji and all responsible Congressmen as being against Congress policy, are exploiting it to precipitate civil war among the people.

Lohia, leader of the Congress Socialists, in the pamphlet *Rebels Must Advance* and in the Hindi journal *Krantikari* openly denounces price-control and rationing and calls upon the city people to resist them "as a form of official blackmail." At the same time he appeals to the peasants not to part with grain even for supplying the needs of the urban population. It is extremely important to remember that Lohia does not merely ask the peasant not to sell grain to Government agents. He actually calls on the peasant to "break all connections including all trade with urban areas" as such.

The last pretention to patriotism is here openly thrown to the winds. The C.S.P. and their friends want to utilise the food crisis for precipitating a conflict between the villager and

the town-dweller, between Indians themselves, between brother and brother, and in addition have the audacity of believing that Congressmen can be persuaded to accept their slogans as a "revolutionary struggle for national independence"!

The Japs are already inside Assam. Congressmen all over the country are issuing appeals after appeals to the people to resist them. The C.S.P. contribution to rousing the people for national resistance is to starve them still further, to make one patriot cut the throat of another, create a situation in which only the bureaucrat emerges all-powerful and the people are crushed.

PROGRAMME AND PLAN OF ACTION

The path for all patriots, particularly Congressmen and Muslim Leaguers, under the situation is clear.

The situation in the province is extremely precarious. Widespread hoarding by traders and zamindars is threatened when already a substantial part of the crop has been destroyed.

There is no solution of the problem short of a total mobilisation of the food resources of the province for the purpose of internal rural and urban consumption, and to the extent possible, for export. The only alternative is the gradual collapse of rationing leading to starvation in cities, and famine in areas which have suffered most from crop destruction.

TOTAL MOBILISATION MEANS VIGOROUS AND JUST PROCUREMENT OF THE GENUINE SURPLUS FROM RURAL AREAS, VIGOROUS PRICE CONTROL, AND TOTAL RATIONING IN CITIES.

Government by themselves cannot execute such a stupendous social scheme. Neither bureaucratic "fatwas" nor the incentive of profit offered to the trader can solve the problem. On the contrary, left to themselves they only make it worse.

A patriotic appeal mainly by Congressmen, and Muslim Leaguers but also by the Hindu Sabha, the Kisan Sabha, and such leading popular organisations is indispensable for making food control successful. Together with such an appeal people in towns and cities must be organised into genuine all parties people's food committees actually to execute what they are called upon to do.

Time is of the utmost importance. Within a month or

two, the situation must obviously become much more difficult and desperate.

The solution will come step by step. The crucial thing is for Congressmen to see that procurement, price control and rationing are in the interests of the people themselves and that they have to be saved at all costs if at least the cities and parts of the rural areas of U.P. are to be protected from serious famine and destitution. The crucial thing is for Congressmen to give up the attitude of sullen neutrality towards the question, and confidently mobilise the people for its solution with the conviction that if they do so Government will have to co-operate with them in the matter.

PROCUREMENT

The first task in food control is procurement. How is procurement to be carried out so that it may be both just and effective?

(1) The immediate thing necessary in rural areas is to concentrate energy and attention on the mobilisation of the entire food resources in every village as the primary duty of the village. It is extremely necessary to get for the peasantry reasonable concessions in rent and revenue and also *taqavi* and seed loans. But unless the existing food in the villages is made available to the village poor at the controlled price, no concessions are going to save him from starvation. The vital importance of the task must, therefore, be fully seen, and stirring patriotic call made to all elements in villages to offer their surplus grain for sale at the controlled price. Such traders, zamindars, richer peasants etc. as do not respond to the call must be exposed, and the entire social pressure of the village brought on them to make them dehoard their stocks.

It is necessary in villages to take a proper census of the village population, make an honest estimate of its food resources, secure and provide the necessary amount for internal consumption, and offer the balance for rationing in cities. No peasant should have to sell what is truly needed by the family. No effort must be made to hide away a real surplus.

It is clear that these and subsequent tasks need the creation of fully representative village committees. Such committees alone can create the necessary popular sanction for making the entire village population carry out the patriotic food policy placed before it.

(2) How is the surplus to be supplied to the cities? According to the existing official policy, Government agents do not go to the villages for purchasing grain. They purchase it after it arrives in the *mandies*.

Village committees must, therefore, demand from the district magistrates, marketing officers and regional food controllers, that Government agents must purchase grain from and through the village committees.

Purchasing from the *mandies* has to end. According to that method, the trader, on the one hand, robs the peasant by paying him as poor a price as he can, and the urban population by charging an extortionate price from Government.

At the same time, the Committee should insist that Government agents must not approach the individual peasant for making their purchases but purchase only through village committees. This alone can provide the peasant full protection against the malpractices of the official agent in regard to price, weighment of stocks, and so on.

So long as Government agents do not go to the villages for purchase, peasant committees must secure proper receipts from the local traders to whom grain is sold, and insist, as far as possible, that they must later give an account of how they disposed of the grain purchased by them.

(3) The existing ceiling prices fixed by Government in wholesale *mandies* must be accepted. They are, in surplus districts: Wheat 10-4-0; Gram 8-3-0; Barley 7-3-0; and coarse rice 13-8-0 a maund.

In fact, these prices, far from being unreasonably low, are high. They would mean wheat being sold at about 3 seers 8 chhataks, gram 4-8, barley 4-12, and rice 2-12 a rupee in the urban areas which are very high prices for the cities.

Moreover, in deficit districts, Government have openly declared that such prices will be fixed as may be necessary to attract grain! Already the surrender to the trader has begun.

The grave fault of the official price-control scheme is that it makes no provision for the payment of a minimum price to the peasant. The task of peasant committees is, therefore, to see that a reasonable proportion of the controlled wholesale price in the *mandi* actually reaches the peasant. On the basis of normal practice the peasant should get a price about 0-8-0 less than the *mandi* price. In no case should the difference exceed a rupee. Roughly, therefore, the peasant should get Rs. 9-8-0 a maund for wheat, and Rs. 7-8-0, 6-12-0, and 12-8-0

a maund for gram, barley and rice respectively.

The Government of India have also fixed 7-8-0 a maund as the minimum price of wheat, and given an assurance that in case it falls below 7-8-0 a maund in 1944, they will purchase all wheat of standard quality, offered to them at that price in certain wholesale *mandies*. But at the moment there is no question of prices falling to that level.

Every effort must be made to demand the enforcement of price control in deficit districts also. The prices offered in surplus districts are themselves so high, that higher prices are not needed in deficit areas.

It is an equally important task of peasant committees to call on the peasant, particularly the rich peasant and zamindar not to sell his grain above the controlled prices. Vigilance in this respect, will not be needed less but more than for getting the peasant the proper price. Anyone trying to sell above the controlled price must be exposed and isolated and the authorities must be asked to sell his stocks publicly at the controlled price.

Village committees must demonstrate not merely by propaganda but by actual proof that they want to and can mobilise the food resources of the village far more effectively than any other agency, that they alone can make price control at the procurement end effective. It must be seen in practice that without village committees there is neither procurement nor price control, but only the hoarder gets everything and black-mails the people and Government in paying him whatever price he demands.

(4) On the strength of this campaign Government must be called upon to open cheap grain shops even in villages, distribution being done either through controlled shops or village co-operatives.

Similarly, shops for supplying cloth, kerosene, sugar and other urban products needed in villages at controlled prices must also be demanded.

Demands for proper remission in rent and revenue, for *taqavi* loans, seed loans, manure, and similar articles for raising grain production to the maximum in the next year have also to be made, and wherever zamindars are attempting to evict peasants under Section 171 of the Tenancy Act, redress must be asked against such eviction for the purpose of keeping up crop production at the maximum.

Only such a whole-hearted policy of securing justice for

the peasant by taking a bold lead in actually making him sell his surplus produce for the needs of the cities and rural poor is adequate to meet today's situation.

The attitude of the great majority of Congressmen today, which is of demanding proper redress of peasant demands but of completely evading the responsibility of appealing to him to do his duty in the situation, cannot solve the food problem. As already shown, in the long run, that policy does not serve the real interests of the peasant either. It only plays into the hands of rich peasants and traders.

There is also no doubt that once Congressmen take this positive attitude towards procurement they will be in a far stronger position for securing the peasant his demands re: rents, evictions etc. than they are now.

PRICE-CONTROL

The question of making price-control effective at the procurement end has already been dealt with. It is natural that if price control fails there it fails all along the line upto the final consumer.

At the same time, the actual enforcement of price control must be done simultaneously at the procurement and the consumption end.

Official price control in U.P. at the moment only attempts to fix prices in wholesale markets, leaving out both the peasant and the urban consumers from the picture.

For this reason, it is necessary to demand the statutory enforcement of price control in the retail trade as well. The small consumer must be saved from the clutches of the retail trader who is at present practising the most rampant profiteering.

Price control in the retail market is necessary for a successful procurement policy also. Not to control prices in the retail trade is to invite the wholesale trader to sabotage Government procurement and resort to unbridled loot in the retail market.

The application of price control by Government to the retail trade, however, is only the beginning. By itself, as has been the universal experience till now, it is not going to achieve the desired object. On the contrary, in the absence of popular vigilance, it only leads to black-marketing.

The actual enforcement of price control in the retail trade

will have to be done by the People's Food Committees themselves. The people must be roused not to pay prices above the controlled rates and to publicly expose those shopkeepers who demand higher prices. Severe punishments such as fines and confiscation of stocks must be demanded against profiteers. Food Committees must keep watches over shops in their mohallas or villages to detect breaches of price control orders.

Only in this fashion can price control be enforced in the retail trade.

RATIONING

However defective, a system of rationing is already working in U.P. The question is how to improve and perfect it. If any proof was needed of the advantages of rationing in war time, it has been given during the last month.

After the rains, only ration shops have continued to sell grain at the old price. One has only to imagine the havoc that would have taken place in U.P. if it did not even have partial rationing, and if overnight grain prices had risen from 4 seers to $2\frac{1}{4}$ seers a rupee!

Rationing is the only side of food work on which some organisation and mass activity have been done last year. More or less live City Food Committees have functioned at Allahabad, Benares, Lucknow, Agra, Jhansi and Cawnpore. A number of Muslim Leaguers and Congressmen have supported and participated in the work of these committees. They must be made the nucleus for a full mobilisation of the city people for rationing.

The central demand which must immediately be put forward through city food conferences in the major cities of the province is the introduction of total rationing and the ending of retail private trade wherever such rationing is introduced.

To many people this might seem not merely a bold but hazardous demand. In a vague and confused way, people are afraid that while total rationing will mean the closing down of private shops it will fail to guarantee a regular and sufficient supply of food to the people.

Partial rationing or total rationing with the continuation of private trade, (called total open rationing) on the other hand, are supposed to offer people a double source of supply which they can use according to their need.

Nothing is more dangerous than this opinion, particularly

in the background of the serious crop damage in the province.

The fact is that partial rationing and total (open) rationing are purely fair weather schemes. They function so long as the trader finds it profitable to supply grain to Government and when there is no scarcity in the open market. Exactly when scarcity in the market grows, i.e. when the trader finds it profitable not to sell to Government, both partial and open rationing are threatened with a breakdown.

And this exactly is the position today. Either in U.P. the greater part of the surplus of all peasants who have a surplus over their family needs is going to be gathered and made available for the non-producers in villages and cities, or even the existing rationing is going to crumble by steps and there is going to be grave famine in a number of districts.

The meaning of Government refusing to accept total and closed rationing (i.e. with private retail trade banned) is that it does not want to take the full responsibility of providing food for all the urban population. It means it wants to follow a weak procurement policy and allow large stocks to remain with the traders. It means it is afraid of the traders. It means large quantities of grain going into private hoards bringing starvation and destitution to all the poor elements in villages and big sections in towns.

The alternative is not between partial rationing and total (open) rationing. There is no basic difference between the two. The alternative is between partial rationing and total open rationing on one side, and closed total rationing on the other.

Closed total rationing alone is in people's interest. It must be vociferously demanded by all cities.

Closed total rationing has functioned satisfactorily in all major cities in Bombay. There is no reason why it should not function in U.P.

There is no question of private traders being ruined under total rationing. Most of them can and will be put in charge of the rationing shops themselves.

It must also be demanded that the stocks at present held by wholesalers and retailers in cities be taken over by the rationing authority at the controlled price. If people's food committees take a lead in locating and acquiring such stocks there is no danger of private traders succeeding in hiding them away or in any injustice or high-handedness being shown to them by officials while their stocks are requisitioned.

The requisitioning of private traders' stocks, however is as necessary as a successful procurement drive for the new crop.

In the cities it is also necessary for food committees to deal with all the complaints of card holders re : the quality of grain, adulteration, convenience of distribution, corruption, ration shop stocks being disposed of in private shops and so on.

PEOPLE'S UNITED FOOD COMMITTEES

The role of food conferences and even more of food committees in cities and villages is decisive for the success of the foregoing proposals.

Prejudices against price control and rationing are deep. There is a tremendous difference between the appearance and the reality of these questions.

The peasant does not see that the temptation of securing the highest possible price for his produce ultimately only ruins him by forcing up the prices of urban goods, by giving the hoarder the chance of later selling him at a ruinous price the same grain which he purchased from him earlier in the year at a much lower price, and by breaking up rural economy as a whole.

Without intense agitation and explanation, without rousing the patriotism of the peasant and the town dweller to fight the battle for food even at personal sacrifice, without convincing people that unless this is done, the country is faced with greater starvation and tragedy than in 1943, without pointing out the danger to which the country is exposed through the Japanese attack, people will not carry out the aims and policy outlined above.

This is exactly the reason why a lead in the matter has to come from leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League. Only these two organisations can galvanise the whole people into the arduous tasks of the food campaign.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE

It will be rightly asked that if the situation promises such optimistic results, why is it that a powerful food campaign has already not emerged in the province?

The question needs a frank reply.

The first reason is that only after a whole year's bitter

experience are the bulk of Congress and League patriots turning positively towards food control as a popular necessity. The early reactions to the food crisis were so blind that price control, rationing, and procurement were looked upon more or less as a vicious official scheme for robbing and starving the people. In desperation, many believed that rioting and not food control was the solution of the food problem. The understanding of the food problem in nationalist ranks has distinctly improved during the last year.

Secondly, it was only since September and October last that large numbers of Congressmen including leaders were released from jail. Before that the paucity of Congressmen outside jails and an atmosphere of intense demoralisation also stood in the way of action.

Thirdly, the continued decline in food prices between October last year and the end of March created a lot of complacency among the people. The young food movement which began in June when the food crisis in U. P. was at its highest, cooled away after October.

Some of the valuable work done by the movement even during the few months of acute suffering and despite the fact that it was too young yet to shoulder higher responsibilities, deserves to be recorded.

Two very representative conferences were held, one at Allahabad and one at Lucknow, asking for full rationing and price control.

At their best, 30 mohalla food committees functioned in Allahabad, 29 in Benares and seven in Agra. In Jhansi and Lucknow, the city food committees functioned actively but did not form many mohalla committees.

In Benares Sjt. Sri Prakash and at Allahabad Mr. Lari whole-heartedly supported food work. In a number of committees local Congressmen, Hindu Sabhaites and Muslims also participated.

The attitude of the district and local authorities to the food committees was distinctly hostile at the start. Every effort was made to ignore them. to set up rival committees under official domination and thus to stifle them. In the course of time *de facto* dealings with the committees were begun at Allahabad, Benares, Lucknow and Agra. In Allahabad, the entire task of distributing cards to deserving persons was for some time in the hands of the food committees in the mohallas in which they functioned.

What were the committees actually able to achieve?

(a) In most places cards were secured for large numbers (3000 for workers alone in Allahabad) to whom due to the highhandedness, indifference, or corruption of local officials they had not been issued, and most of whom would have gone without cards but for the local food committee.

(b) The question of improving the quality of grain in a number of shops was tackled satisfactorily.

(c) In Benares, kerosene and sugar distribution also were taken up by the food committees. The corruption, profiteering, and popular misery that normally accompany kerosene and sugar distribution make it unnecessary to describe the relief this work has brought to the people.

(d) Agitation for the extension of rationing to large sections of the people, and for reduction in price of rationed grain was also done. Though not powerful enough to be effective in determining the pace of the actual extension of rationing and lowering of prices in ration shops it had an educative value, particularly in poorer mohallas.

(e) Food work as a whole helped to put heart in the people at a time when due to intense repression, political demoralisation was so acute that people felt utterly helpless to face the grave food situation that existed in U. P. during the summer and monsoon months last year.

The elementary nature of these tasks is clear enough. The only point is that they were done and a certain revival of popular life in the cities of U. P. achieved when the majority of Congressmen and Muslim Leaguers had not yet put their shoulders to the wheel.

What a difference it is going to make when they join up!

IV. FROM UNITY FOR FOOD TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

AS POINTED out in the preceding chapter, the actual solution of the food problem hinges on Congressmen giving a lead in the matter and inviting the co-operation of the League and other patriotic organisations for rationing, price control and procurement.

There is no reason to believe that such a course either will not be accepted by Congressmen, or if accepted, will fail to secure response from the League. On the contrary, the situation in U. P. is very ripe for Congress-League co-operation on the food issue.

First as to Congressmen. We have already shown why food work, far from being a futile surrender to Government, is a form of popular service and organisation that must bend the Government for the solution of the most burning popular problem of the day.

If further sanction in the matter be needed, Mahatma Gandhi's reference to the food issue in his correspondence with the Viceroy from jail is a clear directive. One of the reasons given by him for undertaking the fast was that he had "to be a helpless witness of the privations of millions owing to the universal scarcity stalking the land."

This is nothing short of a mandate to Congressmen to actively take up food work. Since the correspondence, not scarcity but mass deaths have been stalking the land.

More recently, Mrs. Naidu has paid public compliments to the work of the all-parties' food committee in Hyderabad, and called on Congressmen to remember that unity, non-violence and service of the people were the fundamental planks of Congress work under all circumstances. The last session of the All-India Women's Conference attended by Mrs. Naidu and Mrs. Pandit demanded "control and rationing of the necessities of life in co-operation with popular food committees."

From another angle also, food work is going to face Congressmen in U.P. as the biggest task within the next few months. The meeting of released Congressmen held in Lucknow in April decided to contest the ensuing Municipal

elections. The scarcity of food, cloth and other necessities of life is going to be the central popular issue in the elections, and a programme of making price-control, rationing and the suppression of black-marketing effective through municipal and official co-operation will simply sweep the polls before it.

In the rural areas, the destruction of crops has brought the issue of food to the forefront, and no Congressmen, who is at all desirous of being and working among the villagers can decline to face it any longer. Both as a necessity and opportunity, therefore, Congressmen have to face the food question in the immediate future.

There is every reason to expect a response from the Muslim League as well. Both the Delhi and the Karachi Sessions of the Muslim League demanded "immediate, comprehensive and effective price control and rationing of essential commodities." They further demanded that "the representatives of the people" must "be associated with the planning and execution of the scheme of purchase and distribution."

In his letter to Sajjad Zaheer (*People's War*, June 13, 1943), Nawab Ismail Khan writes :

"I agree with you that the Muslim League Civil Defence Committee should co-operate with your People's Food Committees in various localities as the aims and objects of both the bodies are similar, viz., to ensure a joint and proper distribution of foodstuffs to people and to prevent profiteering and hoarding. I am glad to learn from you that in most places the Muslim League committees are fully co-operating with your food committees."

In Behar the Muslim League formally participates in all-parties' food rallies and food committees.

An important resolution passed by the Bengal Provincial Muslim League Council on 7th November 1943 stated :

"In order to implement the instructions of the All-India Muslim League, the Provincial League Council has decided :

- (1) to establish non-official representative committees throughout Bengal with powers to organise the campaign against hoarders and profiteers ;
- (2) to merge official relief committees with local food committees ;
- (3) to organise the distribution of foodstuffs through these food committees ;

- (4) to purchase the "aman" crop in a proper way for distribution ;
- (5) other necessities of life to be controlled successfully ;
- (6) in municipal and Union areas Government shops to be opened ;
- (7) strong action to be taken against profiteers, black-marketeers, and hoarders."

Even in U.P., despite the elementary nature of the work done, during the last year some Muslim League representatives associated themselves with popular food conferences and committees.

With such declared policies and practices of the League and Congressmen there is every reason to be confident of Muslim League co-operation with the Congress on food. The gravity of the new situation is an added factor that makes response from the League still more certain. ,

The only thing wanting is for Congressmen to decide to launch the food campaign and seek Muslim League co-operation to drive it forward.

FROM FOOD TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Joint work by Congressmen and Leaguers for fighting the battle for food is not going to end where it begins. Unity on food will and must lead to political unity for solving the national deadlock and securing National Government.

The thing happens this way. Government policy does not merely ruin the morale and economic life of the people. By thoroughly alienating and isolating itself from the people it brings the military defence of the country itself into jeopardy being incapable of dealing with economic problems even to the extent necessary for guaranteeing successful military defence. It thus exposes and discredits itself not merely as an anti-popular policy but an utterly inefficient, impotent and bankrupt policy.

As people see this reality more and more, a terrific popular clamour arises demanding that Government must accept popular co-operation for the solution of problems that it cannot tackle by itself. At the same time, instead of taking an attitude of hostility and opposition to such questions, the people and their patriotic parties develop an urge for helping to solve them voluntarily and positively.

It is due to this reason that recent months have witnessed

in England and America the upsurge of a terrific popular demand that Indian national leaders must be released, a national settlement made, and the problems of defence and food solved with the co-operation of the people's representatives. The Bengal famine and the actual entry of Jap armies into India have utterly blown up the last shred of justification for Mr. Amery's policy. The universally growing opinion and demand now are that the British Government is incapable of tackling the problems of food and defence on their own and must accept Congress and Muslim League co-operation if they are to be successfully dealt with.

THE NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

A new understanding of the situation has been growing in India also and unity on food is going to be the biggest lever for its strengthening and further growth.

With the actual entry of Japanese troops into Assam, an entirely new realisation of the meaning and responsibility of national defence is growing among Congressmen. The Congress has always stood for national defence against fascist aggression. But the average Congressman has always been contraposing the struggle for National Government to the task of National Defence. Though in principle, he has all along stood for the country's defence, his practical policy has been one of "National Government first and defence afterwards."

The situation in Assam is making the Congressman think anew. The realisation is growing that no matter who rules the country, no matter whether Government gives him opportunities for defending his Motherland or no, his primary interest and duty is to drive the Japanese off from Indian soil.

It is still not understood that this battle against Jap aggression is itself the path of the country's advance to independence in today's circumstances. Giving primary place to national defence, however, is itself the beginning of such understanding.

This is the great and historic significance of the call for unity and defence issued by the Congress leaders of Assam and Manipur such as Sjt. Gopinath Bardoloi, Irawat Singh and others. This is the meaning of the declaration made by the Lucknow meeting of U.P. Congressmen that Congress stands for resistance to aggression under all circumstances and that Congressmen must spare no sacrifices in the sacred cause of national defence.

A parallel change is coming over Congressmen's attitude towards the issue of Pakistan. Among the ranks a lot of confusion, hesitation and mistrust exist even now. But, once again, on this issue as well, U.P. Congressmen have clarified the Congress position as one of freedom to the federating units of free India to secede from the federation if they so desired. They have, in essence, declared that the Congress stands not for "Akhand Hindustan" but for unity based on the unfettered right of self-determination.

Muslim League ranks also have not been slow to respond to this new consciousness among Congressmen. For the first time after years, Congressmen and Leaguers joined hands together in the last session of the Central Legislative Assembly to defeat the Government on the issue of unjust taxation and the suppression of civil liberties. Both Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan and Chowdhari Khaliqzaman have welcomed the statement of U.P. leaders regarding the Congress position on self-determination, and Mr. Jinnah himself has appreciated the change in nationalist outlook towards Pakistan by saying that "it is a genuine swing round" (Aligarh, March, 1944).

A very rapid realisation has grown among Muslim ranks that not the Congress but the British Government stands in the way of their attaining Pakistan.

Particular emphasis is being laid by League leaders recently that the basis of Pakistan is complete freedom both for Hindus and Muslims.

At the Karachi Session of the Muslim League in December 1943, Mr. Jinnah said :

"There is no truth in the suggestion that we welcome British Raj. To say that the League did not want independence was sinister, vicious and wicked propaganda against the League." Again, at the meeting of the Muslim League Council in November 1943, he said, "The whole basis of Pakistan was freedom for both Hindus and Muslims; you cannot have Pakistan without the Hindus getting Hindustan and their freedom."

On the issue of Hindu-Muslim unity speaking at Lahore on 22-3-44, Mr. Jinnah said, "Blood is thicker than water. We Hindus and Muslims are brothers, inhabitants of one country. Our enemies think we can never unite. But we will unite much sooner than they expect and together we shall free our country."

Again, in an earlier speech, (Delhi session of the Muslim League, April 1943) he said, "Can't we say, unite, unite and unite and get the British out? Let us sit as equals and come to a settlement, that will be the greatest day both for Hindus and Muslims."

Unity between Congressmen and Muslim Leaguers on food is going to galvanise, unite and sweep forward all these trends and forces that in the absence of such unity are at the moment only tardily and laboriously groping their way towards national defence, towards power, towards solving the food problem and towards achieving Congress League unity.

To begin with, the very fact that the Congress and the League launch a campaign for fighting the nightmare of intolerable prices and scarcity of food and other necessities of life is going to create tremendous hope and confidence among the people in the province. The bulk of the poor in town and country will immediately heave a sigh of relief and know that the humiliation and misery of being bullied by police and civic guard officials in queues, and being fleeced by unscrupulous shopkeepers and traders are over. When price-control, rationing, procurement, and the struggle against hoarding, profiteering and black marketing secure the authority and sanction of the Congress and the League, people will immediately see what is in their genuine interest and what is not; and the whole strength of popular opinion and volunteer and other organisations built up by popular food committees will isolate and punish hoarders and profiteers as the enemies of the people that they are. Corruption, both official and unofficial, will also be speedily exposed and brought to book.

It is also beyond doubt that the mobilising strength of People's Food Committees unitedly led by the Congress and the League will be far greater than the mobilising capacity of the Congress and the League taken separately. The enthusiasm roused among the people by the two organisations joining hands will be qualitatively of an entirely new character and will awaken and release popular energy unknown to our national struggle since the great days of the Khilafat movement.

The first victory of united food committees led by the Congress and the League, will, therefore, be a wiping out of the stifling atmosphere of helplessness and frustration that at present pervades the province and paralyses all plans and proposals for popular intervention in any public problem. Pessimism will give place to hope, apathy to keen interest,

passivity and stagnancy to action and life.

And Congressmen and Leaguers sitting in common committees cannot be prevented from discussing self-determination, the actual policies and aims of the Congress and the League, and the concrete expectations that followers of each organisation have from the other. Common work and association will be the biggest solvent of prejudices and mistrust and the creator of mutual confidence and faith.

Agreement between Congressmen and Leaguers on Pakistan means an agreement between the two for achieving political power. Food unity thus grows over into unity between our premier national organisations on the issues of Pakistan, the release of Congressmen in jail and the ending of the deadlock for the establishment of a National Government at the Centre constituting the Congress, Muslim League and other leading patriotic organisations in the country. It grows over into a unity for rousing the entire people of the country for a smashing counter attack against the Japanese invaders and the final elimination of the fascist danger from the borders of our country.

The United Provinces are the stronghold both of the Congress and the League. A lead coming from the province rouses and sets in motion similar forces all over the country. There can be no doubt that developments of the nature outlined above will have an immediate effect in other provinces as well.

Not the most sun-dried reactionary elements in the British Government can succeed in stopping the joint march of the Congress and the League to power if they follow the course visualised above. The strength of the forces in England demanding a continuation of the Indian deadlock lies in the Congress and the League not coming forward unequivocally for national defence and the solution of the food problem and in their not meeting the British Government with a united demand. With Congress-League unity achieved on the basis of the right of self-determination and with the two organisations boldly championing the cause of defence and people's food, no British Government today can decline to settle the issue of the transfer of power to Indian hands. The entire forces of our national movement and the new popular forces in England and America will demand such a settlement both because it is just and because the Indian Government has proved itself incapable of solving the nation's problems without co-operation from the people's representatives.

Such are both the responsibilities and opportunities of the food movement in the province. The choice is between our great patriotic organisations clasping their hands for a common endeavour to save the province from famine and to march forward to political power and the country's defence or turning their back on the common starving man in town and country, leaving him to become a pitiable victim of bureaucratic callousness and the profiteers' greed. Naturally the broader national implication of this course also is that the country remains utterly apathetic towards the question of defence and the Japanese play havoc with the lives of the people of Assam without a voice of protest being raised either from Assam or the rest of the country.

There is no question which of these two courses the Congress and the League will ultimately adopt.

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