

# PEOPLE'S WAY TO FOOD

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The Report made by S. G. Sardesai before the plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India held in Bombay from 10th to 24th February 1943.  
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S. G. Sardesai

## I. INTRODUCTION

**T**HE food situation in the country is fast heading towards a disaster. The great mass of our countrymen are face to face with absolute starvation. It is no longer a question merely of shockingly high prices, nor even of extreme scarcity. For large masses of the people, food simply is not there. If the problem is not promptly solved, it means for them imminent and literal starvation.

All over the country controlled food grains have vanished from the open market. In most urban areas men and women have to stand in endless queues for a few pounds of grain, undergoing indescribable hardship. They are also subject to very brutal handling at the hands of the police and abuses such as corruption and undisguised cheating.

Conditions in rural areas are not better but worse. What with the criminal hoarding that is so rampant and the export of food grains from many areas without the slightest consideration for people's needs, the countryside has been reduced to a state of famine. In parts of the Madras Presidency and districts in Bombay and Bengal, failure of crops has precipitated a regular famine on the top of the food crisis. Deaths due to starvation, selling of children by starving parents, peasants living on roots and herbs, mass exodus from famine areas, etc., are being continually reported from the rural areas.

Organised gangs of armed dacoits have emerged from the starving peasantry. Villages are being pillaged and gruesome murders committed. The "Amrit Bazar Patrika" issue of the 8th of January alone reports armed dacoities from five districts of Bengal.

There are any number of instances from every province where starving men in cities and villages have violently seized hold of food stocks. And food riots on a mass scale have also made their appearance.

In accordance with age-old experience, pestilence is following in the wake of mass starvation. Cholera and plague are breaking out in a virulent form in Madras and Bengal. Week by week thousands are succumbing to cholera in certain districts of Malabar and Tamilnad.

The situation has undergone a slight alleviation during the last few weeks due to the winter crops having just arrived in the market. But the alleviation, such as it is, can only be temporary, for the basic forces that have brought about the crisis still continue to operate in the same unbridled way as ever.

It must be clear to the most purblind that unless food is immediately made available to the people and the situation brought under control, there is bound to be an explosion of mass fury in the country far surpassing the outbursts that followed the arrest of the national leaders and suppression of the Congress on the 9th of August last.

Where will food riots lead the country today? They will lead it to utter social disruption and ruin. It is Government's bankrupt economic policy and the criminal greed of a handful of hoarders that is at the bottom of the present food crisis. And the two between them are not merely causing mass starvation. *Their policy is further creating a complete deadlock in the whole economic life of the people, setting the villager against the town-dweller, the consumer against the trader, the wholesaler against the retailer, the worker against the employer, in fact, each against all.*

Food riots, today, are, therefore, a civil war to the hilt between every section of the people and the rest.

And this civil war is being precipitated at a time when the threat of a Japanese invasion still hangs over the country.

Nay, more. Many among those who claim to speak in the name of the Congress even now are interested not in uniting the people and getting them food but in exploiting the food crisis to create still more chaos and disruption in the country. Mahatma Gandhi's concern over the food situation has come as a great help to those who want to unite the people on the issue of food. But there are many Congressmen who still persist in glorifying food riots as a revolutionary struggle for independence.

What can food riots in such a situation mean but national suicide? They will offer the Government the best excuse for intensifying repression against the people. They will destroy the last remnants of public morale in the country. They will spread utter despondency and helplessness among the masses. They will kill all popular will to resist both the bureaucracy in the country and the new foreign invader. They will be a godsend for the Fifth Columnist to ply his treacherous trade. They will make the people an abject victim of whichever of the two rival imperialist powers ultimately succeeds in consolidating its hold over our country. Food riots cannot and will not get food for the people. They can only bring bloodshed and fratricidal war to our countrymen.

Food riots today are the extension of the national crisis to the sphere of the most elementary and universal need of the people, viz., food. When hunger drives people mad, nothing

but blind self-interest and the law of the jungle holds sway over their minds. The disruption and ruin food riots will bring in their wake, will, therefore, envelope the entire masses of the people. National disruption will end in social disruption. The country will be engulfed by complete anarchy and chaos.

## II. WHY STARVATION? TWO CURRENT EXPLANATIONS

**WHY** has the food crisis become so acute in recent months? Why are the masses of the people facing utter starvation? Why is famine stalking one of the most fertile lands of the globe?

Two explanations are commonly given in reply to these questions. One is given by the bureaucracy and its representatives. Another is given by the grain hoarders and monopolists and is substantially believed by nationalist opinion.

Government say that it is the food hoarders that have secreted all grain and are solely responsible for the mass starvation prevailing in the country. The hoarders retaliate by saying that it is the loss of the Burmese rice supply and the huge purchases made by the army for troops in India, North Africa and the Middle East that have led to the present plight of the people.

Government's explanation though true in this sense that the greater part of the hoarded grain in the country today is held by the food monopolists, utterly fail to explain why the monopolists have recently started to hoard grain on such a big scale and what conditions enabled them to resort to that criminal practice. Government by its explanation seeks to hide the fact that it is its own selfish and bankrupt policy in matters both political and economic that has given birth to the grain-hoarder and the monopolist in the country. More. By putting the whole blame of the food crisis on the hoarder, the Government goads the hungry masses against the whole mercantile community and invites civil war and disruption in the country.

The hoarder, on the other side, tries to cover up his sins by pointing his accusing finger to military purchases and exports. It is true that Government has made vast purchases for the army without consideration for the interests of the people and also exported large stocks of grain abroad. Since figures of such purchases and exports are not officially revealed, no one knows precisely what their quantity is. But according to Mr. N. R. Sarker, Ex-Food Member of the Government of India, the total grain deficit this year, making allowance for the loss of the Burmese supply and for army purchases and exports (and adding the increased production resulting from the 'Grow More Food' Campaign), amounts to some 25 lacs of tons. This is not a serious deficit compared to so many India has had to face in pre-war years. By itself, it can explain high prices and scarcity but not the absolute starvation



that stalks the country today. It may be borne in mind that India's wheat and rice production alone is over 350 lac tons a year.

The hoarder's explanation also, therefore, fails to explain the intensity of the food crisis in addition to covering up his own sins as a hoarder. What is worse, it does nothing beyond creating a feeling of mass desperation which again leads to rioting and disorder. People cannot get food by merely cursing the bureaucracy, and the hoarder's explanation shows them no way by which they could get it.

Both the government's and grain hoarder's explanations, therefore, are only partly true. Both try to cover up one's own guilt and responsibility for precipitating the crisis by blaming the other. Both fail to explain why Government purchases and hoarding should have only recently grown to such vast proportions as to bring about a complete vanishing of grain stocks from the market. Both lead to rioting, anarchy and social disruption. Neither shows the way to the effective solution of the food crisis.

### III. FOOD CRISIS IS EXTREME INTENSIFICATION OF NATIONAL CRISIS

**To understand how to solve the food crisis, it is necessary first to understand its real nature and the causes that have brought it about.**

**The food crisis is the extreme intensification of the national crisis. It extends the national crisis to the most elementary human need, viz., food, thereby creating a deadlock in the entire economic life of society and bringing in its train utter social disruption and ruin.**

**The description of how the food crisis is manifesting itself in the country shows how it is nothing less than a further aggravation of the national crisis.**

#### THE ROOT CAUSE—IMPERIALISM'S POLITICAL & ECONOMIC POLICY

**In order to realize the full significance of the food crisis and to grasp the way out, it is necessary to see how it has emerged out of the economic and political policy of imperialism and the national crisis precipitated by it.**

**From the very beginning of the war, imperialism has heaped increasing burdens on the shoulders of the people and followed an economic policy that far from checking the profiteer and the hoarder has only fattened them at the cost of the people.**

*Government's price control and supply policy results in the starvation and the robbing of the people and disrupting their unity.* **It claims to control prices on paper. But being itself based on the profit motive, it is an utter failure in practice.**

**In the beginning of the war, Government actually welcomed rising prices by characterising the phenomenon as prosperity. Government denied the straightforward truth that for the great masses of the people, namely, the poor peasants, workers and men with fixed incomes, rising prices not only do not bring prosperity but a higher cost of living and want.**

**The first great speculative price rise in India after the war took place at the end of 1939. It was only then that Government began to move. Even so the only thing it did was to declare a set of so-called controlled prices without making the slightest provision for the control of supplies. It did not seek the co-operation of the people in the matter. The only enforcement of price control it attempted was to occasionally prosecute**

stray shopkeepers and merchants that committed breaches of its price control orders. Naturally, and inevitably, prices continued to rise and profiteering continued to grow.

With every serious aggravation of the war crisis since 1939, prices have suddenly leapt up, and on every occasion they have risen to greater and greater heights. This first happened at the end of 1939, then after the fall of France, then when the Soviet Union was attacked, and again after the Japanese declared war on the Allied Nations. The latest leap has been after the 9th August crisis and it is still continuing. The index number for all food articles in Calcutta which was 116 in August 1939 rose to 371 in November 1942. And these indices are based on controlled prices, not on black-market prices !

Government's price control policy has thus been one of putting a legal sanction on every speculative rise that has taken place since the beginning of the war. But as prices went on rising higher, the economic crisis went on deepening and created more problems. In the beginning, Government's economic policy led to high prices and profiteering. Then it created black-marketing and scarcity. Now food has vanished from the open market altogether. Indeed, Government's policy of appeasing the hoarder at the cost of the consumer has gone to such a length that ultimately the wheat merchants of the Punjab have openly turned on the Government and forced it to abolish price control over wheat altogether ! Government has been compelled to recognise black-market prices as legal prices, the black-market as the legal market. No confession of bankruptcy and failure could be more complete than this.

This policy, however, has not merely starved the poor and is dislocating the entire economic life of the people. It precipitates severe and even bloody conflicts between different sections of the people.

It is notorious that though Government does next to nothing to check profiteering and hoarding, it permits the grain purchaser and contractor to fleece the peasant producer and screw out grain from him at the lowest price he can force on him.

Due to the cornering of grain by the big grain monopolists, the small trader is being driven to the wall. He cannot pay the monopolist the price demanded by him. Under Government's distribution policy he is prevented at many places from dealing in grains the price of which has been brought under control. Deprived of his trade, he either sinks or himself becomes a black-marketer. When riots occur, he is the first one to fall a victim to mob frenzy.

The vanishing of food from the market is compelling workers in many places to resort to strikes. That leads to loss of wages, stoppage of industry and often to violence and disorder.

Often Government declare price control over the finished product without controlling the price of the raw material. This happened in the case of mustard seed and oil. In the case of sugar-cane, the price fixed by the Government is so low that cane-growers *en masse* are taking to the production of gur.

In many cases, prices have been controlled in one district but not in the adjacent one, with the obvious result that grain vanished from the first and popped up in the second ! Sometime ago, the U. P. Government's price control orders led to wheat becoming the cheapest grain in Hapur.

Such chaotic and unprincipled price control necessarily intensifies the conflict between various sections of the people, disrupts national economy, brings the economic structure of society to complete deadlock, and ends in sheer rioting and bloodshed.

Government's supply, transport and distribution policy is on a par with its price control policy.

In fact, it is because a bureaucratic imperialist government cannot and will not control supply and distribution that its price policy also is a miserable failure.

The Central Government have no effective control over the supply policy of the Provinces which go on banning exports from their territories as and when they choose. The military authorities go on purchasing grain wherever and as much as they want without the knowledge of the civil authorities. Even inside their own territories, Provincial Governments follow no effective and concerted policy. District Magistrates and village patils go on holding up the free movement of grain and adding chaos to confusion.

Wheat is hoarded in the Punjab. The man in the street in the province itself, however, gets no wheat. In Bombay and many places, wheat is not available even in the black-market. Potatoes go on rotting in the Nilgiris, but there is a ban on their export abroad. Tens of such cases of the utter chaos that prevails in the sphere of supply and distribution can be quoted.

The same is the condition of transport. The army authorities have so completely monopolised railway transport that the normal life of the civilian population is being increasingly dislocated. The situation is still further worsened by lack of co-ordination between civil and military transport and transportation of various commodities needed for civilian life itself. Northern Indian sugar is shipped to Bombay and Bombay sugar to the North ! There is a calamitous shortage of coal supply in many industrial centres.

Mills and factories, some even producing material for war, have stopped for months. The chaos in transportation thus still further adds to the starvation and misery of the people.

A Government that follows such a policy in the matter of controlling supplies and prices cannot organise increased agricultural production. A tremendous lot of advertising of the 'Grow More Food' campaign has been done. But the campaign has not even touched the fringe of the problem. Almost the entire 7½ million acres brought under cultivation through the 'Grow More Food' campaign have been taken over from other crops and were not new land brought under tillage, though there are over 10 crores of cultivable wasteland in India. What is worse, the 'Grow More Food' campaign is not accompanied by any reduction in the crushing burden of debts and rent, with the result that the overwhelming mass of the peasantry has no incentive to grow more food and has given no response to the appeals of the campaign. The 'Grow More Food' campaign, therefore, is no less a farce than the other parts of Government's economic policy.

#### CRISIS DEEPENS WITH JAPAN'S ENTRY INTO WAR

After the entry of Japan into the war and particularly, after the occupation of Burma, the situation worsened still further.

As Japan threatened a direct invasion of India, it posed before the British rulers the question of defending the country in co-operation with the people or by still further suppressing them as an immediate and unavoidable issue.

British imperialism chose the latter path. It started intensifying its repressive policy. It planned the Cripps Mission to divide Indian ranks still further and to enforce a settlement on the Indian people on its own terms. It began to provoke the people to lawlessness and disorder, later to take advantage of these very acts to damn the people as being pro-fascist and crush them to a state of utter demoralisation.

The national leadership, instead of uniting the entire people to foil this game of imperialism, only drifted in practice and thundered in words, ultimately becoming a complete victim of imperialism's provocative policy. The situation culminated in the 9th August crisis.

Imperialism's economic policy during the period corresponded exactly to its political policy. Government suppressed the Grady Mission recommendations and refused to seek the co-operation of Indian Industry for war production. Taxation on income was raised to dizzy heights. An extremely rapid deterioration set in the working-class conditions due to the tremendous rise in the cost of living which was not at all compensated for by the paltry dearness allowances actually granted to them.

In the matter of its food requirements, Government now began to bypass the normal trader altogether and resort to the market direct as an independent purchaser.

Military authorities sent their contractors directly to the rural areas often purchasing grain at higher than controlled prices, at times bringing pressure on the peasants to sell grain at most unremunerative prices. The United Kingdom Commercial Corporation appeared on the scene and began its ubiquitous and mysterious operations, purchasing grain from many parts of the country at prices subject to its own control.

How did the grain trader, and particularly, the grain monopolist and profiteer react to this policy? If Government came down to the country side to suck it dry of its food resources, did the grain monopolist come to the aid of the people to protect their food and offer it to them at reasonable prices? Nothing of the kind. Thinking of nothing but his gross self-interest, he began to hit out both against the Government and the people by passing from profiteering to hoarding, by secreting whatever stocks of food he could lay hands upon, and thus still further aggravating the food situation.

Between the imperialists and the hoarders, the people began to be reduced to a state of utter destitution.

The food situation in the country was thus going from bad to worse throughout 1942 before it burst out in the form of a shocking crisis in December. In the beginning, it appeared in the form of profiteering. Then scarcity and a certain amount of black-market appeared on the scene. In the end, it led to unparalleled hoarding and rocketing of prices, the complete disappearance of food from the market, and to the grave rioting and disorder that spread from end to end of the country in December and January.

#### AUGUST 9TH ON THE FOOD FRONT

It can now be seen how the August crisis became a most powerful cause of the worsening of the food situation and ultimately found in the food crisis itself its most dangerous and acute expression.

The August crisis signified the most violent bursting out of all the disruptive forces in the country mainly because of the repressive policy of imperialism and secondarily because of the failure of the national leadership to unite the people and defeat imperialism's disruptive policy.

The same, therefore, happened to the food situation as to the national situation. Imperialism began to use more and more coercion to solve the food problem. Repressive action against shopkeepers, direct purchase of food stocks of all sorts of food grains, export bans, restricting the amount sanctioned to traders for private trade, forcible opening of shops as in Calcutta, threatening the ordinary householder in the prosecution for hoarding

more than a month's needs, and a host of similar measures now began to be adopted by the Government.

Of course, the more imperialism attempted to solve the food problem in this way the greater were the mess and the misery created by it. The profiteer began to retaliate against the Government by becoming a hoarder and the people began to retaliate by resorting to rioting and looting. The atmosphere of insecurity created by the crisis still further accentuated this development.

Not only this. What was worse that the 9th August crisis made rioting and hoarding themselves political virtues overnight. Both the hoarder and the pro-"struggle" Congressmen now found a patriotic justification for their anti-popular action. Misguided patriots began to glorify bread riots as revolution. Appeals began to be made to the mass of the peasantry in the name of "village self-sufficiency and rebellion against British rule," not to part with a single grain of their produce. The poor oppressed villager, of course, could not hope to carry out the behest. Only the hoarder "rebelled" against the British by getting hold of whatever food was available in the country and withdrawing it completely from the open market. It is thus that the national crisis turned hoarding into patriotism and hastened the process of reducing the masses to a state of absolute starvation.

The food crisis as a political crisis attains its climax in the vast opportunities it offers to the Fifth Columnist to exploit it for his own ends. The easiest thing in a food queue (with all the misery and humiliation people have to suffer there) is to start a riot by provoking the people against the police. The inevitable consequence, of course, is greater conflict among people, more repression, more demoralisation, more pro-Jap feeling. At the time of the Calcutta raids, Fifth Columnists tried their level best to precipitate strikes and spread panic by exploiting the food situation in the city. Food was at least partially responsible for the mass exodus of workers from the city. It was one of the causes of the scavengers' strike. It almost brought necessary services like electricity, gas and water-supply to a standstill.

It is clear, therefore, that the food crisis is not merely a crisis of food but the most dangerous and acute continuation of the national crisis itself. It is through food that the suicidal nature of the national crisis has been working itself out at its worst since December last.

As the food crisis worsens, imperialism will hit at the people harder and harder. At the same time, it has become so utterly incompetent to solve the crisis that in the same breath as it attempts to desperately attack the people and the food monopolists, it also surrenders to the monopolists as in.

the Punjab. Government now proposes to purchase the entire surplus food in the country and to organise its distribution by itself. It also proposes to organise rationing in important cities. But without popular co-operation such schemes cannot succeed. They will end in greater disasters, more hoarding, more starvation, more rioting, more Fifth Columnism, more demoralisation. The bureaucracy is too weak to solve the problem itself. In its hands, the food crisis can only lead to complete economic deadlock and social disruption. It must end in throwing open the gates of our country to the fascist Japanese aggressor. The people alone can solve the food problem. No one else can.



## IV. THE SOLUTION OF FOOD CRISIS

**C**AN the food crisis in the country be solved? It certainly can be solved.

The reasons why it can be solved are simple.

*Firstly*, we still have sufficient food in the country to feed the people. People are starving today not because there is an absolute scarcity of food but because Government's bankrupt policy has encouraged hoarding, and the hoarders, taking full advantage of the opportunity, are criminally secreting grain in callous disregard of popular interests. If Government is compelled to make the hoarders release their stocks, people can get food here and now.

*Secondly*, the food crisis hits the entire people of our country. Barring the big bureaucrats and monopolist food hoarders, everybody is in want of food, most people are starving. The peasant and the worker, the rustic and the town-dweller, women and children—all are hit by the food crisis. On food all distinctions of religion and creed are set aside. Congressmen, Muslim Leaguers, Hindu Sabhaites, Trade Unionists, Kisan Sabhaites—all can unite on the issue of food. Since hunger is a common calamity for all, it can and must unite all in mutual interest, to secure food from the bureaucracy and the food hoarders. Already food has united men of conflicting political opinions in the country more than any other single issue.

*Thirdly*, despite the callousness and repressive policy of the bureaucracy, it is so thoroughly isolated and weak on the food issue and with every passing day is becoming so increasingly impotent that if people do unite on the question, it is compelled to accept their co-operation. It has so miserably failed to solve the question and is so helpless that it cannot resist people's pressure in the matter. The same applies to the hoarders as well. Once people are united, the hoarders can be exposed and their stocks unearthed in no time.

This is why the food problem can be solved, provided the people unite and actively intervene in its solution. The Government and hoarders cannot and will not solve the food problem. But the people certainly can and will.

There is no cut and dried scheme for the solution of the food problem that can be applied at any place and any time. There can be no such solution. At every place and time different ways of rallying the people and getting grain out of the hands of the Government and the hoarders to be applied.

But the general perspective and solution of the problem arise from its nature itself. The immediate cause of the food crisis is the utter bankruptcy of the Government's price control and supply policy. The first requisites of

a satisfactory solution of the food crisis, therefore are that all stocks of grain meant for trade must be stored in public godowns under popular supervision and their prices brought down to the purchasing capacity of the ordinary consumer. In the matter of prices, the prices of other necessaries of life like cloth, kerosene, matches, etc. must also be similarly reduced. Public storage of food stocks alone can completely eliminate the vanishing of foodstuffs and black-marketing.

**“All food in public godowns” and “prices within the reach of the people !”** are our first slogans on the food issue.

The solution of the food problem further must be in the interests of all citizens. Hence its next requisites are that peasant is assured a reasonable price and protected from the rapacity of the village grain-dealer, and the trader himself is given a reasonable rate of profit. A popular solution of the food problem cannot attempt to eliminate the honest trader. It has to free him from the clutches of the monopolist grain hoarder, and protect his trade provided he conducts it at a reasonable rate of profit.

**“ A reasonable price for the peasant ! ”** and **“ Unite with the honest trader, isolate the hoarder ! ”** are, therefore, the next two slogans of the campaign.

Finally, these requisites themselves cannot be satisfied without a complete people's sanction behind them. That is why it is necessary both in rural and urban areas to have people's Food Committees, representative of all sections and parties of the people and secure recognition for them from the Government for the control of supply and the regulation of prices.

**“ People's Food Committees to Control People's Food ! ”** is the fifth slogan of the campaign.

It is clear that only a National Government can solve the food problem on a national scale. The same national unity and National Government that are necessary for the solution of the political crisis are, therefore, necessary for solving the food crisis as well.

**“ National Government for National Control over food ! ”** is thus at once the basic and final slogan of food campaign.

## V. THE FOOD CAMPAIGN

The actual attainment of the final solution of the food problem is by no means a dream. Despite the feeling of extreme frustration and helplessness that prevails all over the country today, as also the feeling that the bureaucracy is too vicious and too powerful to be moved to do anything in the interest of the people, units of the Party all over the country have demonstrated that people can be rallied on the issue of food and the bureaucracy and the hoarders can be brought down to make some concessions to the popular demand.

The Communist Party alone has given an active lead to the people on the issue of food. The Central and Provincial Organs of our Party have run a countrywide agitation on the question. By seeking the co-operation of other local organisations, in innumerable urban and rural areas, the Party has successfully mobilised the people and secured them food at controlled prices. This is not to point out defects in other political organisations. On the contrary, the Party's policy is to build up the widest united front of all patriotic and popular organisations on the issue of food. The point is to see that if almost single-handed the Communist Party could do so much to bend the bureaucracy and the hoarders, active and joint intervention by the Congress, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Trade Unions and the Kisan Sabhas could unquestionably solve the food problem in no time.

What have been the Party's achievements on the food front till now ?

### ACHIEVEMENTS

(1) *Wherever the food question has become acute, the Communist Party has made it a question for forging unity between all popular organisations.* In a situation where the whole country is in a state of crisis due to disunity between the major political organisations in the country, and in which the only hope of popular salvation lies in their coming together, this itself is a major achievement. All over the country, the Party has brought together the representatives of the Muslim League, and other Muslim organisations, the Hindu Mahasabha, a number of commercial and trading organisations, Congressmen, and many other similar institutions for joint food conferences and People's Food Committees. It is true that co-operation on the food issue has not yet extended to other issues. But there is no doubt that as the struggle for food intensifies and becomes a major POLITICAL battle between the bureaucracy and the people, the unity forged on the question of food is bound to become a powerful lever for forging political unity between the various organisations coming together for the solution of the food problem. At a time when the national crisis has secured its acutest

expression in the food crisis, unity on the issue of food must become the most powerful lever for forging all-in national unity for solving the national crisis.

*Volunteer Corps* for securing and distributing food are yet not the general phenomenon. In Bengal, Malabar and Andhra regular volunteer corps doing continuous work have been trained. In most other provinces, they either do not exist or only come together for specific occasions but are normally non-functioning.

2. *A mass of reports have poured in describing how at tense moments when the situation was heading towards riot and disorder the Party through organised popular pressure has compelled the bureaucracy to import food and have it distributed to the people at controlled prices.*

In many cases, the food has been handed over to People's Food Committees and distributed under their supervision and control. In many places officials have opened more shops or licensed shopkeepers for the distribution of food imported by them under popular pressure.

There are rousing stories from Bengal of big hoards of profiteers unearthed by the People's Volunteer Corps. There have been cases in which attempts by profiteers to export grain secretly have been exposed and the grain distributed to the public at the proper prices. There have been cases in Malabar where the stocks of hoarders not prepared to sell their goods at controlled prices, have been seized by popular volunteers and disposed of at controlled prices.

The Party's Food Volunteers have in many places compelled profiteers to reduce prices mainly under mass pressure as also by forcing Government officials, including the police, to take action against profiteers and hoarders. At Fatyabad in Bengal, during the very days of the bombing raids, the price of rice was brought down by Rs. 2/-.

Some Party units have also begun to organise rationing under popular control though the quantity secured for each individual has been determined by the stocks available and not by the minimum standards set by People's Food Committees.

3. *Some very remarkable successes have been achieved by work done in queues.* The queues are the most explosive point of the food crisis. Insufficient stocks in the shops, endless waiting, police arrogance, the rough behaviour of *goondas*, create an exasperation in queues which can any moment lead to serious disturbances and rioting. One would think that at a spot where police misbehaviour is at its worst and mass hunger most acute, intervention by popular volunteers could only expose them to the curses of the people. The opinion actually existed among certain Party members before work in queues was taken up.

But experience has proved the exact opposite. The bureaucracy itself was so alarmed when the situation in queues was at the point of explosion

that it had to concede innumerable demands put forward by Red Volunteers working in the queues.

High police officials issued orders in Bombay directing the police staff to co-operate with Red Volunteers in queue work. When volunteers reported against any member of the shop staff or police force that persisted in taking bribes after due warning, immediate action was taken against him. Even the *goondas* who had become a pest in queues and worked hand in glove with the police, were brought under control by Red Volunteers. Corrupt practices and favouritism inside shops was stopped. Police high-handedness and roughness were considerably reduced.

Party Members have averted food rioting and violence at most critical moments and when rioting has broken out, have actively intervened to stop it. At great risk they have protected shops from being looted and the people from the attacks of the police.

4. *Substantial concessions for the peasantry under the Grow More Food Campaign have been secured in Andhra. 1,200 acres of land and 2-3 lacs of rupees in Tagavi loans have been secured for the peasantry. Canal water has been secured for 2,000 acres of land which formerly did not have it. Landholders have distributed grain free or as a loan without interest to the poor peasants.*

5. *Workers in many places have succeeded in securing the distribution of grain through their employers and in making the employer accept their co-operation in supervising the distribution of such grain.*

6. *In Bengal and Malabar organised efforts have been made to draw women in the food campaign, and already they are securing a mass response. In other provinces, however, no organised effort in that direction has yet been made.*

Such are the main achievements of the Party on the food front till now.

#### FAILINGS

1. *The main failing of the food campaign has been that the gravity and the political nature of the food crisis were not realised till very long and even now have not been fully grasped.*

The food crisis was maturing for months. But only after food virtually vanished from the market and masses of people had to face absolute starvation was the issue taken up as a burning question that needed immediate solution. From the very beginning of 1942, price had reached a dizzy height. From the middle of the year scarcity of food was being experienced almost everywhere. But during this period beyond some agitation for dearness allowance and against profiteering, the question was not taken up either concretely or as a major issue.

Even after August and September when the issue became so acute all over the country, Party units failed to take any serious cognisance of it.

The understanding of the national crisis as well as the unity line was so formal that the fact that the national crisis was securing its most disastrous expression in food crisis itself was not seen.

It was in December that Party units began to take a more serious cognisance of the food question. But even then the problem was seen merely as one of starvation, as one of the Party's so many fronts. Foodstuffs were not available in the the market and they had to be secured. This was all that was seen. What exactly the vanishing of foodstuffs from the market implied, economically and politically, was not even vaguely realised.

Even now the issue has been understood only to the extent that reality has forced its significance on our understanding. As the food crisis developed it began to precipitate strikes in many industries. The danger of the strikes being exploited by Fifth Columnists became acute. Strikes also held up vital war-production and caused a loss of wages when already the workers' income was so miserably inadequate to meet his needs. The chaos of Government's supply policy led to such essentials of life as kerosene and coal being cut off from many industries and whole factories began to close down bringing serious problems of unemployment and economic disruption in their wake. Riots began to break out all over the country.

Only as these developments began to take place did Party members begin to see that the food problem was not a mere question of starvation; that it was disrupting the entire economic life of the people and leading to such grave civil disorder as even the August crisis had not brought into the country. It is this extremely slow realisation of the political significance of the food crisis that has led to its faulty handling by Party Units.

2. This faulty handling of the question expresses itself in many ways. First of all it expresses itself in a hand to mouth approach to the food issue. Issue after issue is tackled as it goes on arising without any effort to plan the food campaign as a whole in a methodical way.

*In agitation*, the food issue is not linked either with the political crisis or the unity campaign. The simple fact that the further continuance of the crisis means social disruption and deadlock is not brought out. In result the fact that food riots today do not mean violence and bloodshed in a general way, but a suicidal civil war among our own people is hardly explained to the people at all. The people, therefore, either resign themselves to rioting with a sense of helplessness, or gloat over them as something that will bring the Government to its senses; or are frightened and demoralised by them just because they involve suffering and bloodshed. The political meaning of the food crisis is entirely lost on them.

*In practice*, issues are taken up as they arise and when they become so pressing that the Party simply cannot connive at them any longer. In almost all places, the food issue was taken up after rioting and the violent

seizure of food by angry mobs had already taken place. Only then comrades have started rushing about to demand grain from the authorities or prevent mischief in the queues. Not only this. As soon as the food situation eases off due to the arrival of some supplies, work on the food front cools down. Food Committees vanish; the volunteers wither away; agitation on issue comes to an end. Some other issue is picked up and food is put back in the cupboard. Once again when the situation becomes precipitate; comrades rush back to food.

The various parts of the food campaign also are naturally dealt with in the same way. When work in the queues begins, agitation comes to an end. When agitation is taken up, the approach to the traders is given up. When attention is paid to the raising of a volunteer corps, the functioning of food committees is forgotten. In some places comrades rushed off to make a detailed statistical study of the food question forgetting to tackle the situation that actually confronted them. In other places, comrades started agitation without knowing anything about the local situation excepting that people were starving. Whichever happens to be the most pressing aspect of the question at the moment, is alone tackled, everything else is relegated to the background.

In many places, Food Committees have been reduced to such a formalism as to be utterly useless in actual practice. In the name of unity, some local Muslim Leaguers and Hindu Sabhaites have been brought together to form food committees, forgetting that in the absence of powerful mass agitational campaign on food and the raising of a volunteer corps, such are not only impotent to secure any concessions from Government but themselves never evince any life or activity. People's unity must and does get food from the Government. But it has to be a living and fighting unity of the people, not a mere top organisation of a number of respectable gentlemen in the town or district.

*Where the various issues of the food campaign itself are not understood as parts of a single campaign, the relation of the food campaign to the wider national issue is bound to be still less understood.*

The food campaign today is the crucial instrument of the national unity campaign. But it will become so only if it is not run formally and is consciously integrated with the political struggle for national unity. This means that it will not do to set up a few top Food Committees here and there. Such Committees can neither solve the food problem nor become a lever for national unity. They will serve that purpose only if the whole people are roused to support the food campaign and made to participate in it actively, as also when through their unity on food, they are made to see the necessity and possibility of their uniting on national political issues.

But this is not being done. At least not a tithe as much as it needs to be done. Only if village and mohalla food committees are built up on the basis of the most intensive and extensive house to house propaganda will the upper food committees become really effective as food committees politically. Only thus can hoarding be tracked down, food secured from the hands of the officials and hoarders, riots averted and popular schemes of rationing be brought into practice.

And only if the food campaign becomes so intense will it become a real political campaign of national unity. Forcing the bureaucracy to make occasional concessions on the food issue is also some measure of political pressure. But it is far from enough to make the people realise their unity of interest on all political issues as also to convince them that if they did unite on national-political issues as on food, the bureaucracy would be compelled to climb down. The food issue does not bring about national-political unity just because all people need food. That is food economism, pure and simple. It becomes an instrument of national-political unity only when at one end, the food campaign is made so intense and linked to general issues that the people realise their unity of interest on all political issues through their unity on food, and at the other end, such unity poses the general problem of the people wresting political power from the hands of the bureaucracy.

Judged by this standard, our food campaign has been in a very primitive state till now. Leave aside forging general political unity even on a local plane through unity on the issue of food, even as organisations for tackling the food issue the food committees and volunteers have functioned in a very weak and spasmodic way. By fits and starts, substantial concessions have been secured. But stable food committees having an active, vigilant and continued mass support have yet to emerge. Without such committees and volunteers being built up, the settlement of the food issue is not possible. Much less can the food issue become a political lever in the absence of organised mass unity being built behind it through food committees and volunteers.

The utilisation of the food issue for building up other mass organisations has been done even less than for building up food committees. There is no organisation today which cannot be strengthened on the basis of the struggle for food. Trade Unions, Kisan Sabhas, Students' Unions, Women's organisations can all be strengthened through unity on food. And through them all, the Party also can be strengthened. The food campaign has not been harnessed to this task till now.

*The basic defect in the understanding of the political content of the food crisis has affected our agitation also.*



Seeing the food crisis today merely as a question of the criminal starvation forced on the masses by the bureaucracy and the food hoarders is bound to give agitation on the food issue a pro-“struggle” and narrow economic turn. This has happened very commonly among Party agitators.

The bureaucracy and the hoarders are vigorously attacked as criminals who are starving the people. The people are called upon not to suffer these hardships any longer and to force the food robbers to disgorge the stocks in their possession. Hardly anything is said about what the people have to do to secure food. The role of food committees and volunteers is not explained. The fact that the bureaucracy is so isolated and weakened today that if people did unite, they could make it give them food, is not pointed out. That starving the people today means inviting civil chaos and helping the Japs is also hardly mentioned. The people are not warned against rioting. This is pure economism on the food front. It is nothing but an indirect incitement to violence. If people do not take to rioting after such speeches, it is not because they have no desire to do so, but because they are in such a demoralised state of mind that even such speeches do not move them. It is also a significant thing that when people are in such a mood, violent speeches only demoralise them still further by creating the impression that the bureaucracy is all-powerful and the people utterly helpless before it.

Another shortcoming in our agitation has been the failure to see the concrete nature of the food situation in one's own locality and agitate on that particular basis. The general solution of the food problem is popularised but the concrete tasks of the moment are not explained. Such agitation naturally leaves the audience unmoved since what it wants to know is how to get food on the spot and not some perfect and hypothetical scheme for the solution of the food problem. This failing, however, is now being overcome in most places.

Such are the main shortcomings of the food campaign run by us till now

## VI. TASKS ON THE FOOD FRONT

Our tasks on the food front are determined by the fact that to-day it is the decisive front through which the national unity campaign has to be built up. It is the worsening or the improvement of the food crisis that is going to determine in the near future whether the national crisis is going to deepen or be overcome.

The conditions for the success of the national unity campaign, therefore, apply with all their force to the organisation of our campaign on the food front.

The basic condition of such success is that in every sense of the term the food campaign has to be an all-out campaign and must in no way suffer from any kind of lopsidedness or incompleteness.

What must be done to make the food campaign an all-out campaign ?

Firstly, it must rouse and unite every section of the people and compel the Government and the food hoarders to release food for the people.

Secondly, it must be most directly and concretely linked with the task of forging national unity for the country's defence and freedom, as also other economic and political demands of the people.

Thirdly, the campaign must be raised on the basis of an extensive and active organisation of the people in the form of People's Food Committees and Volunteers. It must also strengthen other mass organisations like the Kisan Sabhas, Students' Unions and Women's Organisations.

Lastly, the Party itself must be built through the food campaign. The strengthening of the Party is the only final guarantee of the success of the food and national unity campaign.

### AGITATION

Correct and effective agitation is naturally the starting point of rousing and uniting the people on the issue of food. What must be done to make food agitation effective ?

The first thing is to understand the immediate nature of the food problem in the locality correctly and formulate tasks and proposals in accordance with local needs.

What are the food articles that have vanished from your locality ? What are their black-market prices ? Are they available in Government Grain Shops or in licensed grain shops ? What are the abuses prevalent in Government Grain Shops ? What are the workers' demands regarding food ? How are students in hostels to get food ? What is the condition in the queues ? What are the grievances of the honest traders ? Is Government planning rationing ? If so, what is its scheme ? What must be the people's counter-proposal ?

It is these and a host of similar local facts about which proper information has to be secured at the start. It is wrong to go in for a scholastic investigation into the food question for starting the food campaign. But it is equally necessary to have a grip over the immediate and local form of the question.

Why is all this information necessary ?

For this reason that the first requisite of effective agitation on food is that it has to be absolutely concrete and such as points an immediate way out of the situation.

If agitation on food is not of such a nature, if its whole emphasis is not on the immediate practical steps the people have to take to secure food, it is bound to have very bad consequences. Either it will become so general that it will leave people unmoved, or it will end merely in abusing and cursing the bureaucracy and lead to rioting and disturbances.

In formulating the demands of the people the necessities of life besides food must also be taken into account. The demand for effective control of the supply and price of cloth, kerosene, sugar, matches, coal, paper and similar other necessities of life must be vigorously put forth. Similarly, it is not enough just to agitate for the enforcement of the controlled prices. It is also necessary to demand the reduction of prices to a level within the purchasing capacity of the average consumer.

To be effective, food agitation must also create hope and confidence in the people. To achieve this, it must on the one hand, point out how every section of the people can be and is united on the issue of food, and how the bureaucracy is so isolated and enfeebled that the people are bound to secure food if they act in the manner you ask them to do. It must also bring to the notice of the people the victories on the food front secured locally by people all over the country.

Explain to the people fully what the food crises means. Explain how it is the people themselves who will be ruined by civil war if it deepens. Explain how it destroys the strength of the people to fight the bureaucrats and also aids the Japanese invader. What the food crisis means on the issue of national defence was amply demonstrated during the Calcutta air raids.

On the contrary, people's unity on food is a tremendous lever for uniting them on every other issue.

Men of all parties and all communities come together for food. Great opportunities of overcoming mutual political differences are offered. Unity on food can become a stepping stone for Congress-League unity. The same strength and unity of the people that makes them compel the bureaucracy to give them food, can enable them to wrest national govern-

ment also from the imperiatists. All these issues must be sharply and prominently brought out in the agitation on the food campaign. Thus alone will the campaign be a drive for food as well as for National Government.

The linking of the food issue with National defence and National Government must be very concrete and live. It has to be done basically on the issue of food itself. It must point out how through starvation and rioting the nation is disrupted and demoralised and becomes a prey of the bureaucracy and the invading Japs and how through unity on food people's morale, self-confidence and strength are built, which alone are the weapons that can secure National Government and make national defence possible.

Food agitation must also warn the people clerly against food riots. This also can only be done if the real nature of food riots is pointed out to them. It is wrong to frighten people with the bloodshed and repression that riots bring in. That is a pure Royist explanation of the dangers of a food riot. Food riots must be stopped not because people need be afraid of repression but because they are no fight with the bureaucracy and the hoarders at all. They are purely a fight between various sections of the people themselves.

Agitation does not necessarily mean agitation in mass meetings. Over by far the greater part of the country today meetings are banned. But even then, without fervent agitation the food campaign can never succeed. If public meetings are banned, closed-door meetings, mohalla meetings and even house to house agitation has to be carried on. But in no case can the task of agitation be got over or bypassed. And by whichever method it is organised it has to be rousing and effective.

#### ORGANISATION OF FOOD COMMITTEE

The vital need of organisation on the food front is that it must be genuinely mass organisation and organisation expanding into every sphere of popular life.

People's Food Committee representing all patriotic and popular organisations and People's Volunteer Brigades are the corner-stone of organisation on the food front. But they also can be built only if the task is approached in a number of ways at one and the same time.

People's Food Committees covering larger areas and Volunteer Brigades can never become live and effective in a stable way unless they are backed by mohalla committees in towns and village committees in rural areas.

The most extensive signature campaigns on food and the recognition of food committees by Government must be run, particularly in areas where civil liberties are non-existent and the people demoralised, for the organisation of live mohalla and village committees. Baithak and group meetings must be held. Food Manifestoes must clearly bring out the necessity of popular solution of the question in the interest of national defence and

National Government, and for preventing rioting and disorder. Explanatory campaigns on food must be run to explain the food issue to the people in greater detail. Wherever it is possible to do so, of course, public meetings, processions, conferences and demonstrations also must be organised. The sale of the ' People's War ' and other Party literature must go hand in hand with the signature and explanatory campaign on food. Mohalla committees must include representatives of all social and cultural organisations including Bhajan Mandals, gymnasiums, etc. in the mohalla.

The task of building and functioning Food Committees does come across a number of difficulties. First of all, the prevailing mood in the country is such that it takes great effort to convince representatives of popular organisations that united popular efforts can secure food for the people. Secondly, Government officials and A. R. P. and National War Front organisations very often attempt to foil popular efforts to set up Food Committees. Thirdly, grain hoarders and monopolists also attempt to blow up Food Committees by securing the monopoly of grain trade in certain areas from the bureaucracy and at times even going as far as bribery and corruption to gain these ends. Inside Food Committees themselves, on the question of fixation of prices, etc. conflicts between various representatives can and do arise.

*The one thing that must always be borne in mind whenever all such difficulties arise is that every proposal we put forward must do justice to all sections of the people and its one aim must be to isolate the hoarders and force the bureaucracy to secure food for the people. If this principle is scrupulously applied to every situation, every mischief-maker on the food front is bound to be isolated sooner or later and all honest elements united.*

Alert and active volunteer corps are the strong arm of People's Food Committees. They are indispensable for queue work, for educating popular opinion on controlled prices and other price regulations, for keeping a watch on hoarders and unearthing their stocks, for preventing rioting, for protecting people when they do take place and all similar type of work. Concentrated attention must be paid to the task of building up volunteer corps for the food campaign and they must be considered an indispensable part of that campaign.

More grain shops and supplies not merely of food but all necessities of life, better distribution of grain, effective price control, tracking down of secret hoards, and recognition of food committees for controlling supply, distribution and prices, must be the primary demands of all Food Committees.

### FOOD CONFERENCES

It is also necessary for the food campaign to gather more momentum and the food committees to develop more sanction to proceed to the organisation of FOOD CONFERENCES in the immediate future. But the food

conferences must be preceded by real mass agitation, and must rope in the widest sections of the people and the greatest number of political parties. In most provinces local and district conferences can be convened after the necessary spade-work, and in some provincial conferences also. Such conferences will also create greater popular sanction behind the food committees set up by them.

Food Conferences have become an urgent necessity for another reason also. For a permanent and effective control, over supplies and prices it is necessary immediately to organise at least District Food Committees that can secure control over the supplies in the whole district and arrange for their proper distribution at controlled prices. The Food Committees that have arisen till now have only secured control over some stocks of food at irregular intervals and arranged for their distribution. Naturally such successes have not been able to solve the problem of assuring the people a regular food supply at controlled prices. District Food Committees however, can take a step towards solving the problem if they are sufficiently representative to be able to secure recognition from the officials. At present in many parts of the country the movement of food even inside a district is impeded by so many conflicting orders that the methodical control and distribution of food even in a district unit will help tremendously to alleviate the food situation. But the task can only be taken up if really popular district food conferences are held and district food committees organised.

*Every effort must be made to draw WOMEN into the food campaign.* Women Party members and sympathisers must be directed to concentrate on the issue and utilise the food campaign for organising women's meetings. Close women relations and friends of Party members and sympathisers must be approached first and drawn into the women's food campaign. Women volunteers must be organised to carry on food propaganda among other women and to act as volunteers in women's queues. Women representatives ought to be included by every possible effort on all food committees. New women comrades must be encouraged to speak at women's meetings on the issue of food. What a fascist invasion means for women must also be explained in the same campaign and as groups of women become actively interested in the food campaign, P. W. Readers' groups must also be formed among them. Work among women has been till now one of the weakest side of food campaign, and barring Bengal and Malabar, no province has made an organised effort to approach women on the issue.

Particular efforts must be made to draw **Congressmen and Muslim Leaguers in Food Committees.** Many pro-"struggle" Congressmen are prepared to join hands with us on the solution of the food problem. The reason is that usually they have a humanitarian outlook on the question; secondly, food rioting is easily seen as civil war and is very difficult to be

glorified as a struggle against the bureaucracy. The effects of food riots on popular morale are also immediately visible. Thirdly, the people's united struggle for food can be clearly seen as a struggle against the bureaucracy and hence for national government. Lastly, the Calcutta raids have opened the eyes of many erstwhile pro-"struggle" elements on the significance of the food crisis as an aid to foreign invasion. All Congressmen, therefore, must be patiently enlightened on these issues and persuaded to join the food campaign.

Muslim Leaguers also must join the campaign though it may be mainly on a humanitarian basis to start with. But such active co-operation on the food issue itself is a great opportunity for explaining to them their responsibility in the matter of brining about Congress-League unity.

Tenacious and vigorous efforts must be made to draw traders and particularly, the small trader into the food campaign. This is another aspect of the food campaign which has been very much neglected till now. The food campaign cannot flourish on the tomb of the trader. He is one of those sections of the people whom the vicious food policy of the Government and the grain monopolists hits hardest. He must be patiently explained how he is ruined by the two and how in the long run he can only come to grief by resorting to hoarding and black-marketing himself. His real interest is on the side of the people and honest trade with a reasonable profit under the supervision and guidance of popular food committees. On this basis he can get the fullest protection from the People's Food Committees. Signature campaigns declaring their agreement to work under People's Food Committees must be run among traders also, and every effort must be made to draw them into such committees.

In running the food campaign in the present situation, it is extremely necessary to appreciate fully and clearly the utter quandary in which the bureaucracy has been placed and consequent opportunities opened out before the people to secure concessions from it provided the issue is properly approached and the people effectively mobilised. It is true that the bureaucracy is vicious in the extreme. It is also true that it is hitting out desperately against the people. But it is truer still that it is in such a hopeless mess on every question and particularly on the issue of food that it is compelled to bend before the people immediately they bring organised pressure on it for the purpose.

The fact of the matter is that on the issue of its food policy, the bureaucracy has almost overreached itself. As the worst exploiter of the people followed a food policy that brought about mass starvation and the death of the hoarder. But popular starvation now threatens to break out in the form of a countrywide conflagration and the hoarder has bagged so-

much food that he is trying to set the bureaucracy itself at naught. In consequence, just as the bureaucracy is desperate, it is also panicky on the question of food. The result is that as people are increasingly mobilised on the slogans of food, national government, national defence and resistance to sabotage, disorder and Fifth columnism, the bureaucracy finds itself caught in a vice and has to come to terms with the people.

There is no question here of the bureaucracy sympathising with the people. The question is that despite its callousness the helplessness to which it is reduced forces it to climb down. This is the only explanation of the concessions that the food campaign has secured till now. In fact, if the campaign has not been more fruitful till now than it has been, it is not due to the the omnipotency of the bureaucracy but the failure of the people to unite and seize food from its hands and the hoarders. In running the food campaign, therefore, comrades must completely overcome the obsession that the bureaucracy is so strong that nothing can be done against it. Even as we are today, on the basis of a real mobilisation of the people, the bureaucracy can be bent and food can be had. The more and more we rope in an increasing number of political organisations on food, the more the bureaucracy has to bend and give people food. The question is of the unity and strength we build up. On the basis of such strength, therefore, every effort must be made in every locality to approach the local officials and secure from them every possible concession. The experience of Bombay and many other centres fully bears out the correctness of this analysis.

### CAMPAIGN IN URBAN AREAS

In this general background, the food campaign in the urban areas must bring into its sweep the entire town or city population on the basis both of its general and sectional demands on food.

Workers, artisans, the liberal professions (doctors, lawyers and teachers) traders, shopkeepers, women, students, municipal councillors must all be roped in on general demands such as more grain shops, better distribution of food, effective price control, tracking down of hoarders, recognition of People's Food Committees and granting them the right to control supply, distribution and prices, and so on.

In addition, WOMEN'S specific demands in respect of queues such as separate days for distribution, women distributors in shop, etc. must be put forth. Effective protection of women from molestation by the police and goonda elements must be secured. Shops must be located at places which women can visit conveniently and are decent.

Food has become a most acute problem in STUDENTS' hostels, also have kerosene and paper. The educational staff and students must jointly mobilised to get these questions solved by bringing pressure on authorities.



The Trade Unions must put the issue of securing food for workers in the forefront of their tasks. The maximum effort must be made to compel the government to open a sufficient number of well-supplied shops for workers in their residential localities and also to forge a strong worker-trader unity over the issue of grain being supplied to workers by traders under the supervision of joint committees. Traders in working-class localities have every reason to come to such an agreement with workers as grain distribution through mills is a direct ruination of their means of livelihood. This is a better arrangement in the longer run from the worker's viewpoint also, since private traders continue to supply grain to them during strikes which will not be done by employers if they are the agency through which grain is normally supplied to workers. Further, acrimonious strikes on food involve loss of wages for the worker, stoppage of industry and the risk of disturbances. At the same time, provisionally and as a means of breaking the monopoly of grain hoarders, workers have to demand the distribution of grain through their employers as well. Every effort must be made to arrive at such an arrangement through an agreement with the owners that grain distribution through mills and factories will be controlled and supervised by joint committees. But in unavoidable circumstances, strikes also have to be organised on the issue.

Trade Unions must further link up the demand for food with the demand for dearness allowance. On the basis of their production policy, they must run popular campaign explaining to the people how the grant of dearness allowance does not mean dearer but cheaper industrial goods for the consumer.

The maximum use of *queues* must be made for strengthening the food campaign. It is not enough to do Seva Samiti work in queues and to overcome police highhandedness and corruption. The slogan for queue work must be: "fraternise with the queues!" Personal contact must be established with public-spirited men and women who come to queues regularly with a view to drawing them into food committees and volunteer corps. After the elementary tasks of evolving order in queues and overcoming corruption are achieved, a further political approach to persons coming to queues has also got to be made.

It is also necessary for food committees in all urban areas immediately to plan a RATIONING system for residents in their area. Government proposes to introduce rationing in many cities before long. Government's rationing schemes are bound to be another name for semi-starvation. The quantity of food allowed per head will be meagre; its regular supply will not be guaranteed; its quality will fluctuate; the distributing machinery will be clumsy, stupid and bothersome for the people; the whole rationing department will be honeycombed with corruption. Even before Government's

rationing system begins to function, one can predict what its nature is going to be. To avoid that calamity, it is necessary for People's Food Committees themselves to prepare their schemes and approach Government for their sanction. Popular rationing schemes must include :

- a) A calculation of the food requirements of the locality, specifying how much quantity of various grains is needed per head per day;
- b) the demand that reliable arrangements be made to assure a stable supply of food;
- c) the demand that distribution of food will take place under the supervision of Food Committees through private traders. Traders' co-operation must be taken by food committees and Government pressed to use them as the distributing machinery.

The food campaign must never fail to lay emphasis on the task of strengthening the TRADE UNIONS, STUDENT UNIONS AND WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS through work on food. The task of enrolling members in all these organisations must go hand in hand with the organisation of food campaign. Without such organisational strengthening, the food campaign can neither develop the mass pressure and sweep which it must in order to be successful, nor can it become a broad political campaign. It can never be over-emphasised that only to the extent that the food campaign activates people's life on every front will it become a lever for mass political mobilisation for national defence and Government. In other words, the food campaign really becomes a campaign of national unity for national Government, only to the extent that it transcends its limits as a food campaign and forges a general political unity of all the people and parties drawn into it for achieving the goal of national defence and liberation. And the food campaign can achieve such unity only to the extent that it activates and organises the people on all fronts of popular life. This is why the building up of trade unions, student unions, women's organisations etc. cannot and must not be separated from the food campaign or neglected while running the campaign.

### THE CAMPAIGN IN RURAL AREAS

In rural areas, the Food Campaign becomes simply and directly the pivot of all the demands and struggles of the rural population.

In addition to the demand for food the main planks of the campaign in rural areas must be :

1. All-in village unity for achieving the demands of the campaign;
2. Volunteer Corps for village defence against dacoities, for preventing rioting, and for tracking down secret hoards.
3. The peasant to be allowed to retain the minimum quantity of grain necessary for the maintenance of his family and himself.

4. The surplus grain to be sold through People's Food Committees to ensure the peasant a reasonable minimum price.

5. Organisation of the Grow More Food campaign with the following demands:

- a) cultivable waste to be given to the rural poor for tillage at nominal rates of revenue;
  - b) tagavi loans;
  - c) irrigation facilities;
  - d) supply of manure;
  - e) moratorium on debts and rents during the war.
6. Strengthening the Kisan Sabha.

These have to be the planks of the food campaign in rural areas.

The main thing in developing the food campaign in rural areas is to see the tremendous basis for all-in village unity that it offers. In rural areas, as in the urban, barring the hoarders and most anti-popular elements, all rural strata must and can be drawn into the food campaign.

Every effort must be made to appeal to the patriotic and humanitarian feelings of all sections of rural elements, not even excluding the Zamindars. Just as among the traders it is the hoarder that is alone isolated from the food campaign, similarly among the landed elements fire has to be concentrated on the hoarders and similar elements who will not give the peasant food even when he is driven to absolute starvation. All the others have to be won over with the maximum of effort possible.

There is reason today why reasonable elements from the zamindars will give a response to the appeals of the food campaign. First there is the serious danger of dacoities and rioting in rural areas, where police protection is much less effective than in the urban ones. Secondly, even among zamindars there are patriotic elements who can be appealed to in the name of national defence and liberation. Thirdly, the food crisis in many rural areas is becoming so grave that unless food is immediately provided for the peasant, there is a danger of mass exodus and pestilence ruining agriculture or at least affecting it seriously. Due to all these reasons, every effort must be made to draw in patriotic zamindar elements in the rural food campaign.

The connection of the other demands with the food campaign is obvious.

The necessity of appealing to the humanitarian consciousness of the well-to-do elements in rural areas is particularly strong where civil liberties are non-existent and the peasant demoralised. In such places, where meetings also cannot be held, the food campaign has to start from most humble beginnings. Well-to-do peasants and patriotic zamindars must therefore be

appealed to distribute free grain to the poor or loan it to them free of interest. Free seed and manure can also be secured in the same way.

The volunteer corps is no less necessary in rural areas than in cities. In fact it is even more necessary, since the problem of defence is more serious than in towns.

The building of the Kisan Sabha through the rural food campaign is an obvious and indispensable task that can under no circumstances be neglected.

## VII. THE PARTY & THE FOOD CAMPAIGN

The Party is the key-stone of the Food Campaign. The building of the Party is the key task of the food campaign. It is the basic and indispensable guarantee of the success of the food campaign. Why ?

*Firstly*, because the Party alone has a policy regarding the food crisis which is consistent with the needs of national defence and national government, which are the basic needs of the people today.

*Secondly*, because the Party alone shows the unity of the food problem and the problem of national defence and liberation, and consciously strives to link the former issue with the latter in actual practice.

*Thirdly*, because the Party alone has a policy with regard to the food issue which is in the interest of all sections of the people, and not in that of this or that particular section. Hence the Party alone can guide the food campaign through all its storms in a manner conducive to the interests of the whole nation.

*Fourthly*, because the Party alone has taken an active lead on the issue till now, and, being the Party of the proletariat, must play the most active and non-sectarian role in the campaign. The Party alone has a policy which actually secures food for the people and does not satisfy itself by merely abusing the Government and the hoarders while doing nothing to get the people food in actual practice.

*Finally*, because on the issue of food as on every other issue, the Party works harder and more sacrificingly to serve the people than any other party in the country.

These are the simple and unquestionable reasons why the Party's live alone must win on the food issue and why an increasingly stronger Party is the indispensable requisite of its success.

The acid test of our correct lead and actual achievements on the food front is therefore the extent to which it strengthens the Party numerically and politically.

The better and more correct our agitation on the food issue; the more living and fervent the manner in which we link it with the struggle for national defence and liberation, the more we draw Congressmen, Muslim Leaguers, Hindu Sabhaites, traders, women; students, workers and kisans into it; the more we build up mass popular parties through it; and in the simplest analysis, the more food we actually get for the people through the food

campaign; the more must the Party grow through it, the more must the Party be consciously built through it.

Without building the Party there is no giving a correct and practical lead to the food campaign; without such a lead being given to the food campaign there is no national unity for our country's defence and liberation; without defence and liberation, there is no salvation for the forty crores of our countrymen.

Building the Party through the food campaign, therefore, is not at all seeking a sectarian, selfish advantage for our organisation at the cost of any other or our countrymen. On the contrary, the building of our Party is the highest service we render to every Indian and to every other patriotic party in the country. To build the Party is the only unfailing guarantee for the salvation of our motherland.

*Hence our tasks on the food front come down to this.*

— Forward to secure People's Food from the hands of the bureaucracy and the hoarders !

— Forward to People's Unity for Food, for National Defence and National Government !

— Forward to build the Party for National liberation and salvation !

## APPENDIX I.

### BOMBAY

#### Index Numbers of Working Class Cost of Living ( General )

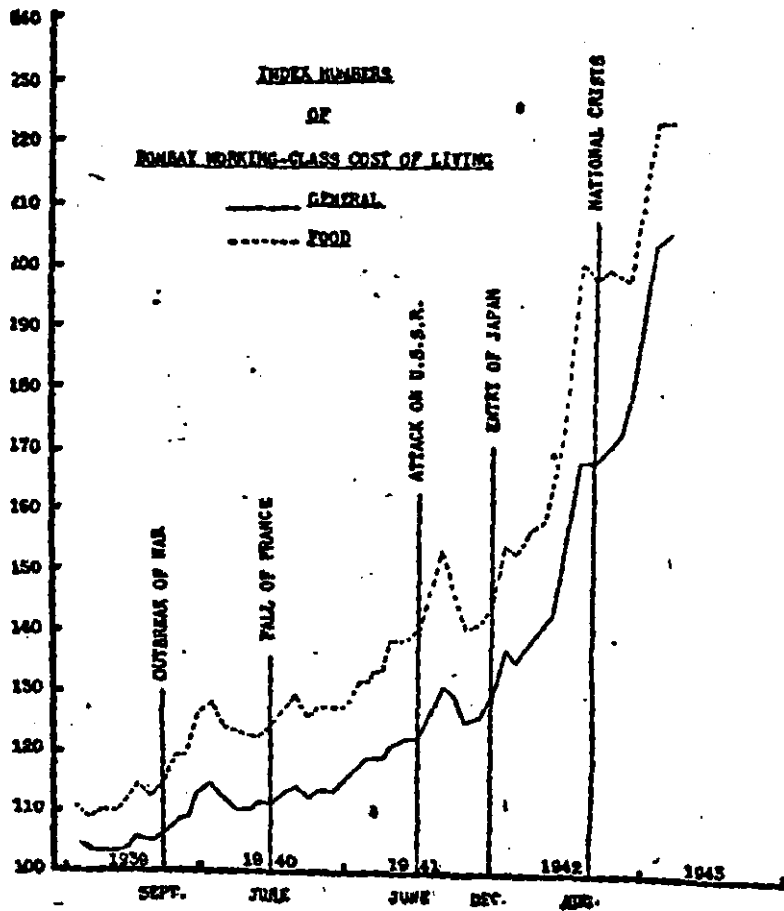
	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943
January	—	114	117	137	208
February	104	112	119	135	
March	103	110	119	137	
April	108	110	121	138	
May	103	111	122	142	
June	104	111	122	152	
July	105	113	126	163	
August	105	114	131	163	
September	106	12	129	170	
October	108	113	125	172	
November	109	113	126	173	
December	113	115	129	183	

#### Index Numbers of Working Class Cost of Living ( Food )

	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943
January	—	123	131	154	223
February	110	124	132	153	
March	109	—	134	156	
April	110	—	133	158	
May	110	122	133	164	
June	112	124	139	177	
July	114	127	145	200	
August	112	129	153	197	
September	114	125	143	199	
October	119	127	140	198	
November	119	127	141	197	
December	123	123	144	209	

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Note:—The Two curves on the other page show the steep rise in the working class cost of living at Bombay ( general and as well as food index ) after the entry of Japan into the war, which becomes steeper still after the August crisis.





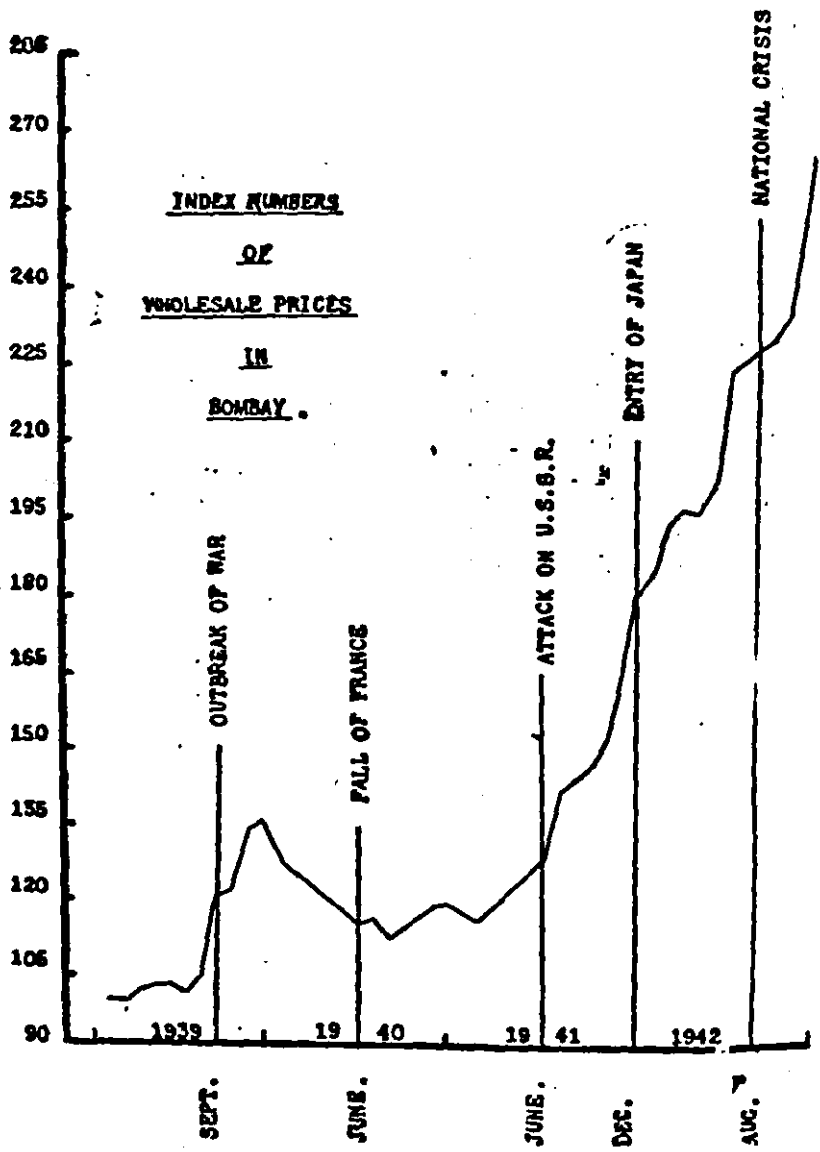
## APPENDIX II

### BOMBAY

#### Index Numbers of Wholesale Prices

	1939	1940	1941	1942
January	—	128	117	184
February	99	124	116	194
March	99	—	120	197
April	100	—	122	196
May	101	118	123	204
June	101	114	127	222
July	100	115	140	225
August	103	112	144	228
September	120	113	145	229
October	121	115	152	233
November	133	118	162	249
December	135	118	180	266

Note :—The curve on the opposite page shows the steep rise of prices after the entry of Japan into the war and a steeper rise after the August crisis.



**WHEAT POSITION ++**  
**PRODUCTION AND REQUIREMENTS**  
(In lakh tons)

Province	Estimated Annual Requirement	Production (1936-37 to 1938-39)	Surplus or deficit	++ Production 1942-43 (Rabi Crop)	Surplus or deficit
Ajmer-Merwara	—	—	—	—	—
Assam	.16	—	-.16	—	-.16
Bengal	2.9	.5	-2.4	.5	-2.4
Bihar	4.6	4.2	-.4	5.0	+ .4
Bombay & States	7.0	4.6	-2.4	2.7	-4.3
O. P. & States	6.4	6.6	+ .2	7.1	+ .7
Coorg	—	—	—	—	—
Delhi	.6	.2	-.4	.2	-.4
Madras **	.8	—	-.8	—	-.8
N. W. F. P.	2.6	2.6	—	2.6	—
Orissa	.1	.01	-.09	.01	-.09
Sind & States	3.3	3.8	+ .5	3.8	+ .5
Punjab & States	32.5	39.2	+6.7	41.2	+8.7
U. P. & State	26.0	26.8	+ .8	27.6	+1.6
Central India	2.9	3.8	+ .9	3.9	+1.0
Gwalior	3.7	3.7	—	3.7	—
Hyderabad	2.0	1.9	-.1	2.3	+ .3
Mysore	.16	—	-.16	—	-.16
Rajputana	4.6	3.8	-.8	3.8	-.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.82</b>	<b>101.71</b>	<b>+1.9</b>	<b>104.4</b>	

++ Estimated in September 1942  
\* Latest report  
\*\* Including Travancore and Cochin

**RICE POSITION**  
**PRODUCTION AND REQUIREMENTS**  
( In lakh tons )

Province	Estimated Annual Requirements	Production (1936-37 to 1938-39)	Surplus or deficit	Production 1942 Khariff	Surplus or Deficit
*Ajmer-Merwara	—	—	—	—	—
Assam ++	17.9	17.97	+ .07	18.5	+ .6
Bengal	88.7	88.00	- .77	73.0	-15.7
Bihar **	32.4	30.55	-1.99	31.4	-1.0
Bombay Province & States	15.1	{ 7.99 2.44	-4.88	{ 10.7 2.4	-2.0
O. P. & States	20.3	16.9	+1.9	22.2	+1.9
		5.8			
Coorg	.6	.8	+ .2	*	*
Delhi	.1	*	*	*	*
Madras & States	53.6	45.8	-7.8	50.8	-2.8
N. W. F. P.	.6	*	*	*	
Orissa	13.4	15.3	+1.9	15.8	+2.4
Punjab & States	3.2	3.2	—	3.4	+ .2
Sind	3.3	4.8	+1.5	4.0	+ .7
U. P.	22.2	20.1	-2.1	23.1	+ .8
Central India	.2	.06	-.14	.06	-.14
Hyderabad	4.5	3.8	-.7	4.3	-.2
Mysore	2.7	2.2	-.5	2.2	-.5
Rajputana	.8	—	-.3	—	-.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>278.5</b>	<b>264.9</b>	<b>-13.6</b>	<b>262.3</b>	<b>-16.0</b>

\* Not known

++ Statistics of area cultivated suggest that figure in column 5 an under-estimate

\*\* Bihar rice harvest reported good.

# THE FOOD CRISIS AND OUR TASKS

*(Resolution passed by the Central Committee of  
the Communist Party of India at its Plenum  
Session on 19th February, 1943.)*

1. THE food crisis which has engulfed the whole country aggravates a hundred-fold the perilous situation precipitated by the arrest of the national leaders and the suppression of the Congress since August last. Prices of food grains have not only risen to such dizzy heights as 200% above the pre-war level, but what is a far greater calamity, food has virtually vanished from the open market altogether. Starvation, famine and pestilence stare the Indian people in the face. The situation is rapidly drifting towards food riots on a countrywide scale.

## THE ROOT CAUSE

2. The root cause of this nationwide starvation is nothing else but the bankrupt economic policy of the imperialist government which has intensified the exploitation of the people during the war and has permitted unbridled profiteering by the monopoly capitalist and trader. Government alone is basically responsible for the vast hoarding of food grains which has led to their virtual disappearance from the market and mass starvation.

The food crisis that broke out in such a violent form in December and now threatens to lead to the most serious political consequences was maturing for a whole year prior to its violent outburst.

Since the declaration of war by Japan and particularly after the occupation of Burma, British Imperialism, far from seeking the co-operation of Indian industry and the national movement in the interests of national defence, has still further intensified the economic exploitation and the political repression already prevalent in the country.

It was this policy that led to the national crisis in August. It is the same policy that has now led to the food crisis.

Though the bureaucracy has never done anything effective to prevent black-marketing, since after Japan's entry into the war, it has attempted

more and more to secure grain supplies directly from the peasantry by bypassing the normal trader in grain. Both the military authorities and the U. K. C. O. have purchased grain in large quantities independently of the normal channels of trade and without consideration for popular needs. Government have also adopted coercive methods to secure grain from the people and adopted what have been simultaneously the most chaotic and the most harmful measures for getting control over food supplies. In retaliation many grain traders and particularly monopolists, have turned hoarders and withdrawn vast quantities of grain from the market, while exasperated masses of the people have taken to rioting and disorder.

The August crisis has still further worsened the situation both on account of the anarchy and general insecurity it has created and due to the scope it has given to hoarders as also to those who want to incite the people to rioting and disorder, to exploit the food crisis for their selfish and criminal ends. It is the national crisis which permits of bread riots being glorified as a "revolutionary struggle for independence" and hoarding *en masse* as a patriotic duty.

Most dangerous attempts have been made by pro-"struggle" elements among Congressmen, and often by Fifth Columnists to exploit the food situation for leading the country to civil war and complete social disruption. Such a development of the food crisis to-day can only lead to utter anarchy in the country and thus offer the best opportunity to the bureaucracy to crush the last remnants of morale still existent in the people. Such a development must also obviously help the Fifth Columnist and the Japanese invader.

Thus the extreme intensification of the national crisis is leading the country to complete ruination.

### TWO ALTERNATIVES

3. In this situation, to leave the initiative in the hands of imperialism, is to allow the food crisis to develop into riots and lootings and to throw open the gates of our country to Fascist and Jap invasion. On the other hand, to unite the people and all the patriotic parties and organisations in a people's campaign for food, to force the bureaucracy to really and effectively control prices and stocks so that necessaries of life would be available at prices within the reach of the people, and to ensure equitable distribution, is to solve not only the food crisis but to move forward towards the solution of the national crisis as well.

### OUR SOLUTION

4. The first prerequisite of a satisfactory solution of the food crisis is that all stocks of grain meant for trade must be stored in public godowns and that the prices of food-stuffs must be brought down to the purchasing

power of the ordinary consumer. This public storage of food alone can completely eliminate vanishing of food-stuffs and black-marketing. Further, the peasant must be assured a reasonable price for his produce. A popular solution of the food problem cannot eliminate the honest trader. He will have to be protected from the clutches of the monopolist grain hoarder, and a reasonable rate of profit ensured to him.

Finally, these prerequisites cannot be satisfied without complete people's sanction behind them. That is why it is necessary both in rural and urban areas to have people's food committees representative of all sections and parties of the people and secure recognition for them from the Government for the control of supply and regulation of prices.

It is also clear that only a National Government can solve the food problem on a national scale. Through the food crisis the Government is ruining the entire nation both economically and politically. The same national unity and National Government that are necessary for the solution of the political crisis are, therefore, necessary for solving the food crisis as well.

#### FOOD CAMPAIGN

5. The Communist Party has not only put down the solution on paper, it has given an active lead to put it into practice. Wherever the food question has become acute, the Communist Party has taken the initiative to forge the unity of the people bringing together men of all organisations into Joint People's Food Committees.

In many places, the bureaucracy has been forced by the pressure of people's unity to import food and have it distributed to the local population at control prices. In other places, the officials opened more shops or have adopted more licensed shops for the distribution of food imported by them under popular pressure.

People's Food Committees and Food Volunteers have in many cases unearthed big hoards, stopped illicit export of grain by profiteers and have forced the officials to sell the goods so seized to the public at controlled prices.

In certain places where the Food Committees have secured stocks of sugar or kerosene, they have successfully organised rationing under popular control.

In big cities like Bombay, Food Volunteers have been organised who kept order in the long queues before Government Grain Shops and exposed the corruption, police high-handedness and prevented the breaking out of riots when the rush in the queues was the greatest.

In certain cases, Party initiative and intervention has resulted in stopping altogether or checking the spread of food riots.

Such in the main have been the results of the activities and the intervention of the Food Committees and Food Volunteers formed under the Party's initiative.

### ACHIEVEMENTS

6. The principal achievement of our activities on the Food Front has been that wherever we have intervened we have demonstrated in practice that all-in unity for food can be forged and that on the strength of united people's action, food can be got, that bureaucracy can be forced to produce stocks and control prices and hoarders unmasked and isolated.

We have shown how food riots are no remedy, and on the other hand, they are a disaster to be checked or prevented on the strength of people's unity. We have thus smashed the game of the Fifth Column and isolated him wherever we have fought against food riots.

We have shown how the small trader and retailer has to and can be won over so that the people's Food Committees, reinforced by the traders, will not only be able to get stocks but start rationing and distribution through normal trade channels.

### FAILINGS

7. The main failing of our food campaign was that we intervened on the food front sporadically and piecemeal. As in the case of our activity on other fronts, we followed the typical spontaneity pattern.

Firstly, we took up considerable time to get going on the food front. We began intervening when the situation had already reached a breaking point. We trailed behind events.

Secondly, we tackled whatever aspect of it came before our nose and remained sticking to it. It was food queues in one place, the fight for mill grain shops in another, the getting and rationing of sugar and kerosene stocks in a third.

Thirdly, therefore, we tackled the whole problem in a typically economist fashion, running it as a partial demands campaign. We failed to realise that our intervention on the food front was on a par with our intervention in the events after August 9. In short we failed to grasp that the food crisis was an extension of the national crisis to food and that the fight for food was closely linked agitationally as well as organisationally with the fight against the Fifth Column (riot-provokers) and with the fight for national unity, national defence and National Government.

Fourthly, this political weakness has led to our failure to form stable Food Committees having active vigilance and continued mass support. In fact; the building of people's unity behind food and Food Committees in localities is the most concrete form of building national unity for defence and freedom.



Fifthly, our agitation often tended to become merely a demonstration of the bureaucracy and the hoarders. On the one hand, we failed to warn the people how the policy of the bureaucracy was leading to food riots and social disruption and thus paving the way for the Japs; on the other hand, we failed to drive home how unity over food must lead to unity for defence and National Government through which alone the problem can be permanently solved.

### TASKS

8. On the basis of a review of the achievements and failings of the food campaign run by us, we can now formulate our tasks and slogans for immediate future. It must be clearly grasped that the food crisis is by no means over. It is bound to worsen until the National Government is won. What has been done so far is that temporary relief has been obtained, the confidence generated among the people in places where we have worked that through united action food can be got. Our job now is to consolidate and extend the advance made to pass on from food agitation and organisation of food conferences and stable People's Food Committees, from unity for food to unity for National Defence and National Government.

Our main tasks are as follows :—

(a) **People's Food Committees** representing all patriotic and popular organisations and people's volunteer brigades—these are the cornerstones of organisation on the food front and they must be organised on the basis of mohallas in towns and villages.

(b) **The Volunteer Corps** are the strong arm of the People's Food Committees. They are indispensable for queue work, for educating popular opinion, on controlled prices, for keeping popular watch on the hoarder, for unearthing stocks and for preventing rioting and loot, and protecting the people.

(c) **More grainshops and supplies, better distribution of grain, effective price control, tracking down secret hoards, recognition for food committees as bodies which control and supervise over supplies, distribution, and prices**—these must be the demands and tasks of the Food Committees.

(d) To consolidate and extend the work done by us on the food front in any given district or town, we should organise food conferences. These should be preceded by real mass agitation and should bring together the widest sections of the people and the greatest number of political parties. Such conferences will create popular sanction behind the food committees set up by them.

(e) **Tenacious and vigorous efforts must be made to draw in the trader and particularly the small trader into the food campaign. He must be made to realise that the re-starting of trade is possible only through**

the work and pressure of the People's Food Committees. We must make every effort to draw him into the same.

(f) Wherever the millowners or workshop management have opened grain-shops in the mill, we should demand their control and supervision through joint committees. At the same time, efforts must be made to get traders in working-class localities to join the People's Food Committees and to agree to sell grain at controlled prices so that the Government can be pressed to use him as a distributing agency.

(g) The main planks of the food campaign in the rural areas must be: the peasant should be able to retain minimum quantity of grain necessary for the maintenance of his family and himself, surplus grain to be sold through People's Food Committees to ensure the peasant a reasonable minimum price, organisation of "Grow More Food Campaign", strengthening of the Kisan Sabha. The main demands of the "Grow More Food" should be: cultivable wasteland to the rural poor for tillage at nominal rates, tagavi loans, cheap irrigation facilities and supplies of manure and moratorium on rents and debts (including those of the co-operative societies), free use of forest for grazing cattle, and also freedom from attachment, during the war.

#### FROM FOOD TO FREEDOM

9. It is the responsibility of the Party to take the initiative to solve the food crisis by performing these tasks. As in the case of the national crisis, either the Party is able to come forward and forge people's unity for getting food, and fight disruption and Fifth Column activity which is coming in through the food crisis end, or the initiative is left in the hands of the bureaucracy to gamble with the fate of the nation, to intensify the national crisis and to open the door for Jap invasion. The capacity of the Party to intervene in the food crisis effectively, to run a rousing campaign drawing in thousands in countrywide food conferences, to forge mass sanctions behind food committees so that they get effective control over supplies and prices, is really the test of the capacity of the Party to lead the people towards the solution of the national crisis and for the winning of National Government through which alone the problem of food as well as of defence can be effectively solved.