**SOME ASPECTS OF PRESENT AGRARIAN CRISIS**

"Their" crisis, "our" crisis:
The present workshop has been arranged on the basis of a similar recognition of the crisis in Indian agriculture with the objective of exchanging views and experiences of various left and democratic forces with a focus on the solutions to the crisis. Our proposed solutions, no doubt, would diverge greatly from the solutions proposed by the mainstream capitalist economists. What is perhaps more important is that not only our approach to the solutions of the agrarian crisis, but our definition of the crisis itself will also be distinctive. For us, the agrarian crisis is neither restricted to fall of the growth rate, or the decline in the gross capital formation in agriculture nor it is reflected in failure of Indian agriculture to be more mechanized and labor saving - simply put, it is not merely some statistics and graphs in paper. For us, the crisis is denoted by the subhuman conditions of life which the millions of Indian land laborers are forced to live, it is denoted by the suicides committed by thousands of small farmers as a result of fluctuations of the global market or by the indebtedness of numerous small and marginal farmers due to ever increasing input cost, it is denoted by the policies which encourage farming only for export, thus threatening the food security of the country. For us the agrarian crisis is also marked by the exploitation of natural resources of the country leading to large scale ecological disasters, it is signified by deprivation of the small farmers, landless laborers and working class people of the right to a balanced and safe food, it is denoted by the ongoing poisoning of the soil, water and food in the interest of national and foreign corporate. Recognition of all these form one of the focal points of the present paper.

### Annual Rates of Growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Food Grain</th>
<th>All Agriculture</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1950-51 to 64-65</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965-66 to 74-75</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<td>1975-76 to 84-85</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<td>1985-86 to 94-95</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994-95 to 04-05</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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Source: C.P.Chandrasekhar, The Progress of Reform and the Retrogression of Agriculture, quoted in Athreya

Source: NCRB 1995–2012 (http://www.agrariancrisis.in)
"New economic policy" and its impact on Indian agriculture:

For a proper understanding of the present agrarian crisis our analysis should not be restricted only to agricultural sector as it can be comprehended more appropriately in the context of entire Indian economy, particularly its present status under the "new economic policy" enunciated by the government in the year 1991. This "new" shift of the policy was nothing new, but an putting into effect the economic philosophy propounded under the interlinked terms like "neoliberalisation" "globalization" etc. All these are imperialistic projects, prompted by the interests of the big monopoly capital of the "developed" world in strong collaboration with the big capitals in the developing countries (which have predominantly mutual dependence between them along with occasional conflicts). This "neoliberal" era is marked by fall of government spending in infrastructure, subsidies and other development works, large scale privatization of the public sectors, free play of market forces with opening up of Indian market to the foreign capitals and stress on production for export, the worst attack on workers right and similar other policies. All these affected the Indian agriculture both directly and indirectly. Directly, the systemic attack on subsidies on fertilizer and on power (which was already meager compared to the developed countries), an attack on affordable bank credit for farmers, an attack on public procurement and marketing bodies, deepening neglect of irrigation and other infrastructures and basic plant research - all contributed to the aggravated crisis. Added to this is the land taken over from the farmers by different domestic and foreign capital either voluntarily or forcefully with direct or indirect cooperation of the government for setting up industries or special economic zones which was in many cases in reality represent nothing but real estate speculations. The indirect impacts of "neo-liberalization" also contributed significantly to the crisis. The macroeconomic policies followed by the government lead to rapid "tertiarization" and informalization of Indian economy with striking fall in the growth of rural employment and preponderance of low income informal "pseudo employment" in the urban workforce with shrinking share of the organized industries and agriculture in the economy. All these contributed to the falling purchasing power and crisis of Indian agriculture deepened. The greater integration of the agriculture to national and global market (including introduction of corporate farming in several states) exposed the Indian agriculture to the vulnerability of market fluctuations, which in the backdrop of continuing depression of global prices of crops devastated the life of thousands of small and middle farmers. On the other hand the stress on farming for export appeared as a threat to the internal food security. While the great mass of the population was suffering severe under nutrition, the export of food grain continued to be raised in considerable amount. During the severe drought year starting from monsoon 2002, despite grain output being 30 million tonnes less than in the previous year from June 2002 to November 2003, a total of 17 million tonnes of food grains were exported by the government. Public distribution system was also practically dismantled in a country where different regions are threatened with a perennial semi famine condition.

![Share of Public and Private Investment in Agriculture](image)

Source: Agrarian distress and distress in India and economic reforms, Athreya
The myth of "good" capitalism:
There is no doubt that the new economic policy implemented by the Indian government from 1990s has brought great miseries upon the people engaged in agriculture (and working class people in general) of our country. At the same time, the new era is characterized by many features which are novel in the history of capitalism. It has posed many new challenges and at the same time opens the door to many new possibilities which the global revolutionary movement must analyze in depth. But there is an error which the left critics of neo-liberalism sometimes commit. This is the error of holding the "neoliberal" policies as singularly responsible for the agrarian crisis (and thus proposing measures such as increase subsidies, more institutional credit to the farmers, minimum support price etc. as the exclusive solution of the problem). As a result, the whole fight against the agrarian crisis effectively becomes limited to go back from a "bad neoliberalism" to a "good state driven capitalism". This analysis is insensitive to the reality of development of capitalism in Indian agriculture and thus in effect proposes a class collaborationist approach against "neoliberalism". This error of the theoretical approach is rooted in a theoretical delinking of neo-liberalism from the capitalism and inability to identify capitalism as an inherently unjust, crisis struck and inequality producing system. As a result, this approach shows the lack of understanding of the historical context of the rise of "state driven capitalism" in a particular phase of it and its transformation to the new model at another historical juncture. Subsequently, this approach is blind to the perennial suffering of Indian agricultural working class (serfs, land labourers, small and middle farmers) in different stages of development of capitalism, from colonial period, to the phase of the so called "state driven" economy championed by some of the adherent to the neoliberal era. This approach to agrarian crisis is also restricted by its inability to provide any theoretical framework to explain the distress caused by the technology introduced by "green revolution" and by its failure to warn us about the dangers of "GMO crops".

Green revolution and its two pronged attack:
In the backdrop of a severe food crisis, which had been a recurrent feature of Indian agriculture, devastated by centuries of colonial rule, feudal exploitation and inadequate development measures by the post independence government, "green revolution" was introduced in India in the early 1960s. This was at first and most extensively introduced in Punjab, Haryana and west UP, but later many other parts of the country followed similar technologies and policy shift, although at a much slower pace. The project was patronized by imperialist forces, mainly the USA. The motivation of exploring the relatively unexplored agrarian
market of the third world for accumulation of profit was intimately related with this endeavor. At the same time a secondary inspiration on the part of the imperialist forces was to avoid the danger of revolt by the farmers and the common people in these poor countries as the socialist block was still a living threat. They wanted to block a "red revolution" with a "green" one. But capitalism being a crisis struck system, every step taken towards alleviating a crisis, though sometimes helpful in averting the crisis temporarily, inevitably gives rise to another crisis in the long run, often graver than the previous one. This is what is at present being observed in the context of Indian agriculture. Green revolution introduced new varieties of food crops, mainly wheat and rice which are highly sensitive to inputs like water and fertilizer. This along with a change in cropping pattern from multi crop rotation to wheat-rice cropping, high mechanization of agriculture, increased exploitation of ground water etc. lead to an early spectacular increase in the productivity of food crops (along with loss of productivity in many other aspects). But the socioeconomic and ecological devastation brought by the same processes have completely overturned all initial benefits. At the same time, after 1980, the benefits of increased productivity started fading away. In Punjab, for example, wheat yield has declined from pre 1980 level of 2.47 percent per annum over the following decade. All these have contributed significantly in precipitating the present crisis in Indian agriculture.

Socio economic impacts of the green revolution are comparatively well discussed issues in the revolutionary camp. The high input cost devastated small and marginal farmers in competition with large farmers. Landlessness and indebtedness grew at an alarming rate. At the same time high degrees of mechanization of agriculture contributed in the slow growth of employment generation. On the other hand less has been discussed within the Indian revolutionary forces about the ecological devastations brought about by newer technologies and farming methods. We will discuss these in a little detail here.

Today, soil degradation has emerged as one of the most serious threats to Indian agriculture. As mentioned in the report of the 11th five year plan, nearly two third of our farm lands are in some way either degraded or sick. The high nutritional requirement of paddy and wheat has exhausted the Punjab soil of vital nutrients. At the same time many other factors like abandoning the farming of pulses, excessive and unbalanced use of nitrogenous fertilizers, loss of biomass due to farming of dwarf variety of crops, loss of organic material necessary for fixation of nitrogen added to the loss of fertility of the soil. Between 1950-60 the soil of Punjab was deficient only in nitrogen, but with the adoption of the new agricultural strategy, it has now fallen short of all other micro and macro nutrients like Potassium, Zinc and Phosphorous. During the eighties, the deficiency of Manganese and Sulfur were also visualized. In the era of nineties, the soil became poor in Copper and other nutrients as well.

Similarly, excessive exploitation of ground water has lead to rapid decline in the water level. In many areas of Punjab, ground water table has receded below the critical depth of 10 meters. Ground water in 80% of the total geographical area of the state is over exploited. Along with the declining water table the perverted use of groundwater has also created the grave problem of water-logging in many areas. Water-logging of the soil stops air from getting in. Oxygen in the soil is necessary for various cultivations. Moreover water-logging blocks the process of leaching, draining out of salt deposited by the irrigated water, which leads to salinization. The practice of planting the same crops over large areas year after year has also encouraged massive increase in pest population. Many species which were harmless before became pests and many minor pests became major. Pest attack in the rice field of India has increased to 500% in the year 2009 from that of 1965. The increased cropping intensity, use of fertilizer and intensive irrigation have also lead to the weed problem becoming a serious threat to rice and wheat rotation. India has suffered a loss of about Rs. 5,000 crore worth of agricultural production due to various pests. Weeds are alone responsible for about 45 percent of the total loss. At the same time consumption of pesticides, insecticides and weedicides has caused serious health problems for farmers and consumers alike. Pesticides are being found in food grains, vegetables, drinking water, buffalo milk and other edible stuff. The Centre for Science and Environment
found 15 different pesticides in blood samples tested from four villages in Punjab. According to a study conducted by the Punjab Pollution Control Board & Post Graduate Institute of Medical Science and Research, Chandigarh, excessive use of pesticides in the rural area was responsible for the increase in cancer cases in the cotton belt of Bhatinda District. Near about 100 cancer patients are going daily by train for treatment at Acharya Tulsi Khetri Cancer Treatment and Resource Hospital in Bikaner. This train covers the distance of 350 kms from Abohar to Bikaner and has now been dubbed "Cancer Train". The attitude of considering all these to be ‘technical matters’ prevalent even within the left, is rooted in an erroneous understanding which considers technology as an independent entity delinked from class relations. On the contrary, the history of the international revolutionary movement has proved that the proletariat cannot just appropriate readymade technology originally invented in the interest of the capitalist class, they have to recreate it based on the specific requirements of the new social order. Thus the question of relation of technology and social classes occupies an important place in any revolutionary endeavor. On the other hand the contemporary ecological movement particularly that of alternative agriculture being dominated by NGOs and other groups is largely limited by their lack of understanding of the class question. Indian left had much to contribute in this regard. In fact, much before the rise of environmentalism Karl Marx proposed a powerful theoretical framework to understand the interrelationship between capitalist system and ecological destruction, particularly loss of soil fertility, in his concept of "metabolic rift". Drawing on the pioneering research of the German chemist Justus von Liebig, Marx showed how, “Capitalist production, by collecting the population in great centers, and causing an ever-increasing preponderance of town population... disturbs the circulation of matter between man and the soil, i.e., prevents the return to the soil of its elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; it therefore violates the conditions necessary to lasting fertility of the soil.” This provides us useful insight into understanding the crisis aggravated by the green revolution. At the same time, the interrelationship of class and ecology affect both the causation and the impact of the green revolution at various levels. For example, the exploitation of the small and marginal farmers and their desperation for survival is behind many ecological catastrophes like unbalanced application of low cost nitrogenous fertilizer and other unchecked abuses of natural resources which have contributed significantly to the present ecological crisis. On the other hand, the resulting ecological devastations and health hazards have different impacts on different sections of the population affected by these in accordance with the social class they belong to. For example wage laborers and marginal farmers are much more prone to the chemical hazards of pesticides and insecticides than large farmers well equipped with safety measures. All these have serious political implications and should be taken care of while deciding the strategy and demands of the agricultural movement.

**The GMO crops: an "ever dark" future?**

As the evils of the green revolutions have been completely exposed today, multinational agencies like Monsanto have come up with Genetically Modified Crops and presented it as the solution to the agrarian crisis which was majorly created by themselves. People like M.S Swaminathan who was instrumental in introducing green revolution in India, has now called for an "evergreen revolution" based on these crops. Genetically modified crops are plants used in agriculture, the DNA of which has been modified using genetic engineering techniques. For example, in Bt cotton, the first GMO crop introduced in India, they have inserted into cotton the gene of the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* producing toxins against bollworm and related insects which are major pests of cotton. As a result this insecticide will be produced in its tissues which, according to the claim of the company will eliminate the need to use insecticides. But the problem is that nature being a complex and interrelated entity, many phenomena observed in the controlled laboratory setting give rise to a completely different effect when applied in nature. The same happened with GMO crops. When Bt cotton was introduced in India many farmers shifted to it in spite of its higher prices in hope of reducing the cost of pesticide. But in many instances pests which were resistant to the toxin became more abundant as no pesticides were applied. Sometimes bollworms also became resistant and the
pesticide use had to be actually increased. This added to aggravating crisis of cotton farming. Besides these, scientists and activists across the globe pointed to many other potential dangers of GMO crops. Animal studies on GMO crops have shown organ damage, gastrointestinal and immune system disorders, accelerated aging, and infertility. Human studies show how genetically modified (GM) food can leave material behind inside us, possibly causing long-term problems. Genes inserted into GM soy, for example, can transfer into the DNA of bacteria living inside us, and that the toxic insecticide produced by GM corn was found in the blood of pregnant women and their unborn fetuses. Moreover, GMOs cross pollinate and their seeds can travel. The potential impact is huge, threatening the health of future generations. Due to these and other potential risks in many countries including Germany and France it has been banned. In contrast, in the last year, eight Indian states largely aligned with Bharatiya Janata Party have approved field trials of GM crops between them allowing tests that include transgenic rice, cotton, maize (corn), mustard, brinjal and chickpea. A united struggle must be waged against this.

On the Swaminathan Report:

The Swaminathan Report is interesting in the ways in which it identifies the problems related to the agrarian crisis and its proposed solutions. According to the suggestions in this report, the major causes of the agrarian crisis have to do with - the agenda of land reform lying unfinished, poor quantity and quality of water, technology fatigue, insufficient access, lack of timely institutional credit and its insufficiency, and lack of opportunities for assured and remunerative marketing. The report suggests that farmers need to have assured access and control over basic resources, which include land, water, bio-resources, credit and insurance, technology and knowledge management, as well as markets. At a glance it would seem to be a ‘peasant path of capitalism’ in Indian agriculture. Hence, many of the demands that a progressive peasant movement should raise, appear to have already been raised in the report’s recommendations. However, there are quite a few aspects in the issue at hand, that need to be probed more deeply.

First, we shall do well to remember that MS Swaminathan was the figure who ushered in the ‘Green Revolution’ in our country - the ‘Green Revolution’ that ruined agro-ecological balance in many parts of India and destroyed its immense species diversity with its ‘myth of productivity’. The crisis to which Swaminathan is now pointing - such as depleting soil fertility, the lowering of ground-water levels, the increase in pest attacks and nutrient deficiency as well as poisonous matter in the food-chain - is one to which the ‘solutions’ he himself prescribed four decades ago, have heavily contributed. Even before the ‘Green Revolution’ project, Swaminathan advocated increased government investment in irrigation and infrastructure and the hence the apparently pro-people recommendations of the present report should be seen in the context of the forthcoming ‘Second (Ever) Green Revolution’.

The report recommends biodiesel production - an impossible suggestion in the present scenario where the food production in our country (and worldwide) lies steeped in crisis, where we cannot spare enough land for production of food for people, let alone for cars. Another major proposal is the introduction of GMO crops, whose problems have been discussed earlier. Such recommendations for making our agriculture ‘globally competitive’ fully comply with the diktats of imperialist countries and the WTO - but these will only deepen the present agrarian crisis. Besides this, the report generally ignores the stratification and class differentiation within the peasantry and treats ‘farmers’ as a homogeneous category across places and is hence grossly insensitive to problems that are particular to the small-marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. It is indeed telling that in the ongoing peasant struggles in Punjab and Haryana, the sole demand that has surfaced from the whole bunch of NCF recommendations has to do with the Minimum Support Price. This clearly indicates the hegemony that the big-peasants exercise within mobilizations around the MSP. Small-marginal farmers constitute 86.58% of the total agricultural household (keeping out the small farmers, 69.44% AHH have land below 1ha, according to 70th round of NSSO, 2014). Given the small
quantity of marketable surplus produced by these marginal and small farmers, there will only be a marginal increase in their income even if they were to be provided with Swaminathan’s MSP.

“The "net take home income" of farmers (which section of farmers is not mentioned!)”, says the report, “should be comparable to those of civil servants”. Even apart from these issues, the Swaminathan report contains structural contradictions: it advocates strong state-intervention in agriculture and social security of the population dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, and at the same time advocates more linkages with the global market. High MSP and higher return for farmers across all strata will be sure to push up the real wages of the working population in the non-agricultural sector and is a recipe for increased inflation in the present economic scenario. The neo-liberal state will not be able to tolerate such inflation since it will inevitably lead to capital flight. The ‘good proposals’ of Swaminathan’s Report such as large scale state investment in agricultural infrastructure (irrigation etc), farmers’ access and control over land and other resources, provision of social security, nutrition and decent livelihood for all sections of population would require a complete departure from neo-liberal policy and a de-linking from the chain of imperialism.

Some comments on land reform:

We would like to comment briefly on the question of land reform, keeping in mind the central position that it holds in any historical discussion on the revolutionary transformation of Indian society. In our opinion, numerous changes that have taken place (and are ongoing) in Indian agriculture prompts a re-consideration of the issue. Land reform, in its essence, is not a communist project, though communists are usually compelled to undertake it due to the failure on the part of the capitalist class in performing their historical duty - particularly against the backdrop of a predominantly feudal agricultural system. Such reforms have profound political as well as economic significance. Politically, they help end the dominance of the parasitic feudal and semi feudal landlords and to win the allegiance of the small farmers for the revolution. Economically, they are supposed to undermine feudal production relations and increase productivity, creating a surplus that can support industrialization and can provide a market for domestic industry. As far as the political implications of land reforms are concerned, observations made over time have made it clear that at the national level the feudal or semi feudal landlords are rarely influential in terms of the political power they wield. In economic matters, their strength is declining, but this of course, not by any revolutionary course of action, but as a consequence of the expansion of the commodity market and the introduction of new technologies, due to the influence of limited land reforms, fragmentation of landholdings because of population growth and other reasons. All in all, feudalism is in no way in a dominating position. On the other hand, if we consider the economic question, owing to the large size of the population that depends on agriculture and the ever increasing cost of agricultural inputs, we can easily infer that it will be very difficult for small agricultural units to be economically viable - that is, be able to generate any substantial surplus. Such facts, among others, compel us to strike a cautionary note against treating land reforms as a panacea for all economic problems within agriculture in India.

Yet, the heterogeneity within Indian agriculture and the persistence of feudal remnants in certain places should not be forgotten. We should even be prepared to accept the possibility that land-reforms may prove central to revolutionary endeavors - both economically and politically - whether at the regional or the local level.

CONSIDERING THE SOLUTIONS TO THE AGRARIAN CRISIS:

(A) Overcoming the present agrarian crisis does not simply mean freeing agricultural practices from the clutches of ‘neo-liberalism’- a more fundamental departure from the capitalist mode of agriculture is necessary. Completely abandoning capitalist agriculture involves aspects such as the following:
1. Abandonment of profit-oriented technology in seeds, pesticides, fertilizers, equipments etc. that are propagated in the name of ‘productivity’ and which are ultimately, unsustainable.

2. Solution of the fundamental question related to ‘metabolic rift’ pursued acutely and continuously by capitalist agriculture through gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equitable distribution of the populace over the country.

3. Solution to basic foundation of capitalist profit-motive through exploitation by abolition of existence of agrarian classes and the capitalist market system.

Here it is important to note that these aspects are deeply linked with one another, for, NGOs often advocate the resolution of the first or the second aspect without paying attention to the third. In this context we need to lay special stress on the question of ‘metabolic rift’ since it is almost entirely missing from most of the revolutionary literature in India. This question of ‘metabolic-rift’, the robbing of soil fertility by capitalist agriculture, as explained by Marx in Capital Vol-III, is not an issue for future societies to grapple with but a concern for agricultural practice in the present day. And its complete resolution lies solely in the revolutionary transformation of agriculture and society.

(B) The effect of ‘agricultural crisis’ is not limited merely to the people directly connected with farming, but involves a majority of the population. The rising market prices of pulses, vegetables and fruits are gradually making them unaffordable to a significant portion of the toiling people. The wide prevalence of cancer and other diseases across the country, increase in poisonous chemicals in food-chains and drinking water, the rapid destruction of the formerly rich bio-diversity of India, the severe damage being done to ecosystems - these are all matters of serious concern. Climate change is also exerting its effects on on agricultural production and its threat is on the rise. Serious discussion is needed, centering on the question of meeting the ‘real need’ (distinct from today’s capitalist sense of need) of food for the world population in an environmentally sustainable way - this, while keeping in mind the increasing population pressure and consequent urbanization, along with the depletion of agricultural land.

As a consequence of the growing consciousness about adverse effects of GMOs, chemical fertilizers and pesticides among certain upper sections of the world population, ‘organic farming’ has been gaining in popularity across the globe over the last two decades. In the capitalist world, there are 11 countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, Italy etc., where 10% of the total cultivated land is being used for practising ‘organic farming’ (statistics of 2013). This trend has been catching on in India as well, though land used in ‘organic farming’ is only 0.3% of the total farm land. The percentage of land used in ‘organic farming’ in China, Germany, Japan, Britain, France, and America is higher, as compared to India. The price of this special category of food, popularly called ‘organic food’ is 50% to 100% higher than the price of the same category of food produced by cultivation techniques that use chemicals. ‘Organic farming’ will get increasing support from NGOs and also, advocates of capitalism - since the imperialist countries need such produce to cater to the consumption demands of the upper section of their population. Hence, ‘organic farming’ will become more widespread in the ‘developing countries’ for export purposes, with only a small proportion being produced for the home-market.

However, it will be intensely problematic for revolutionaries to stop here. First, a sustainable agriculture broadly entails the use of indigenous seeds (or such seeds that farmers have control over and which are compatible with agro-ecological sustainability); sustainable use of water and other resources; local consumption etc., and is far from being limited to the non-use of chemical fertilizers/pesticides alone. The methods for this agriculture include integrated pest management, crop rotation, composting as well as soil and water conservation etc. It is also of utmost importance to evolve a long-term strategy to challenge the
technological control of the capitalist class or of a small elite section of the society (even in a ‘post-revolutionary society’) over agriculture.

The question of sustainable agriculture is not a question of ecology and technology alone, but is also a political question involving issues such as decentralization; local people’s/community’s control over resources and means of production as well as economic democracy. Scientific research and embryonic endeavors are needed to nurture and strengthen this ‘alternative’ as a replacement for capitalist agricultural practices. Today’s Biotechnological, Micro-biological and Agricultural research is dominated to such an extent by the profit-motive and directly funded by the corporate powers operating in Agro-business, that the scope for ‘sustainable agriculture’ is not being explored in any true sense. The capitalists now tell us that we do not even need a lot of land for agriculture - rather, it is the efficiency/productivity that should be enhanced using appropriate technology. We have to make a clear departure from this mode of agriculture which has proved to be non-sustainable and damaging to the environment. We need to emphasize that more land is indeed required for agriculture and that, apart from preserving existing agricultural lands from indiscriminate urbanization initiatives should be taken to restore fallow lands and even towards such practices such as urban farming.

But we must keep in mind that unless the government takes appropriate infrastructural initiatives, it will not be possible for large sections of farmers to follow such a path to sustainable agriculture. Instead, small projects of ‘organic farming’ will continue to serve the bifurcated food market. The peasant movement along with other sections of the society should therefore, strongly voice the need for supporting alternative agriculture.

(C) The relationship that agrarian crisis, food crisis and price rise of essential commodities have with the political and economic policies governing the country is so deep that fighting the ‘agrarian crisis’ is integrally connected with many other issues. Far from listing out the tasks at hand comprehensively, we shall try to indicate some relevant points:

1. The land-reform program had remained weak or incomplete in some states/areas. Efforts should be initiated to demand a review of the Land Ceiling Act and to give more land to the real farmer. Statistics from various sources have already proved that the productivity per unit of land in India and many other countries is greater in small holdings than in large holdings.

2. The policy of increasing the productivity per unit of land at any cost (mainly by using chemical fertilizers/pesticides and groundwater in greater quantities) should be checked and controlled. Farming should be more intense and more labour-intensive. Crop diversification should be enhanced in order to restore and develop soil fertility. Greater emphasis should be placed on the cultivation of indigenous high yielding food grains.

3. Reforming irrigation systems is needed, with maximum emphasis laid on government initiatives to build canals from the rivers and constructing reservoirs to store rain water. A movement should be encouraged, demanding budgetary allocation from the Central and State Governments for irrigation of this kind. Public awareness about the dangers of unrestrained use of groundwater and the need to maintain the natural environmental balance should be boosted. Along with this, legal measures against indiscriminate use of ground-water (particularly in places where groundwater level has already fallen) should be taken.

4. A strong campaign should be launched across the rural regions of the country, against the problems of GMO seeds and the Second Green Revolution. This should be combined with campaigns within other sections of the society about their devastating effects in the long run.
5. A movement should be encouraged demanding an increase in subsidy on agricultural inputs for those farmers whose land-ownership is under 4 hectares. Long-term planning is needed to make a gradual shift from the present agricultural mode to an ecologically sustainable agriculture. Progressively increasing the proportion of expenditure on agricultural inputs must be used for local units manufacturing manure and other materials useful for ecological/organic farming. Government expenditure should be increased in agricultural research and a sizable amount should be utilized for the development of the technological aspects of ‘sustainable agriculture’ and would popularize it among farmers.

6. Despite the shortage of food grains in the country, the production of commercial products (mainly tea, coffee, winter fruits and vegetables, flowers, biodiesel plants and others) is being launched specifically for purposes of export - and this, on land meant for food-grain cultivation. A demand should be raised to stop this change and a movement should be encouraged in this context denouncing WTO’s declared policy on agriculture.

7. Public opinion should be mobilized to put a full stop to the export of food grain from the country and ensure food-sovereignty. Effective resistance and propaganda against the acquisition of fertile agricultural land should be organized. On the other hand, a larger number of government initiatives should be demanded for the conversion of barren and non-fertile lands to fertile ones.

8. The movement across the country demanding a Public Distribution System for 80% of the total population should be strengthened.

9. There should be a persistent struggle for increasing the wage/income of the agricultural labourer and poor peasants should be organized so that they can get their fair share of agricultural products. Small and middle peasants, too, are facing severe hardship. Their demands should be supported. Level differentiation should be considered for agricultural loan waiving. Such schemes should be supported only in the case of marginal-small-middle peasants.

Questions and challenges facing the peasant movement:

a) The question of land-distribution was the central agenda of the Indian peasants’ movement for a long time. In the present situation, despite there being a huge number of landless peasants and marginal farmers, the land available above the ceiling is not substantial - so that, if that amount of land were to be distributed, that would hardly offer a solution to the present crisis. For this objective reason, in most areas the movement for land-reform has lost its relevance.

b) Another important demand raised by the movement was to increase the wages of agricultural workers. This demand too has faced problems with the declining capacity of small and middle peasants. The large scale of rural to rural migration has made organizing agricultural labourers a more difficult task.

c) The major portion of surplus from agriculture is siphoned off by the imperialist capital through inputs (seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and other agricultural equipments) and markets (by unequal trade in export or contract farming). In that sense peasants across all strata, including big farmers, are in one sense against imperialism. This had led forces such as the CPM to adopt a a class collaborationist approach with respect to the peasant movement. It is true that certain sections among the big peasants have invested in taking agency away from the imperialist forces and are expropriating substantial profits through that mechanism. However, there remains a contradiction between the big peasants and imperialist capital. The question facing revolutionaries today, is what would be the proper way to use this contradiction in fighting against imperialism and creating an
independent assertion of agricultural labourers in alliance with poor peasants, under the leadership of working class.

d) The land relation is heavily skewed when seen from the perspective of social groups with lower castes - for they have very little land and access to other common resources. It remains a significant question as to how the progressive peasants’ movement will raise the issue of caste and how caste movements will respond to the issues related to the agrarian crisis.