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Bangladesh

Peasant Movement in Bangladesh and Bangladesh Krishok Federation

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This presentation was made by Pathak Lal Golder at the French New Anticapitalist Party (NPA)'s summer university in Port Leucate in August 2011. At the recent meeting of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L) was accepted as a Permanent Observer within the Fourth International.

Introduction

Peasants all over the world are now at the verge of destruction because of evil design of the industrial agriculture. In Europe, America and Australia peasant farmers are disappearing every day. While in the developed world the situation is so, 80% people are still engaged in agriculture in Bangladesh. The main incomes and employments are still based on agriculture. However, as a profession agriculture is not a dignified one in Bangladesh. A successful peasant too does not want his children to become peasant professionally rather every peasant family expects their children to be service holders or business holders. This is because of the fact that the agriculture as a profession is undignified and always a losing and risky sector. In the government there is no representation of real peasants and so-called moneyed educated business-industrialists are running the state in the name of democracy. For this reason the state is limited to take hardly steps in the development of small-scale peasants and family farmers.

There are a total of 165 million people in an area of 56000 square miles in Bangladesh, which is number one in view of the density of population. Nevertheless, these are peasants who are feeding the people of Bangladesh. And the country imports foodstuff, especially rice insignificantly. Foodstuff is imported less than the import of luxurious goods in Bangladesh. Hence the peasants are still driving force of productivity in the country.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF)

The peasants were in the lead of any successful movement in the Indian sub-continent. The role of peasants was very glorious in the all movements including Tebhaga movement, Nil revolt, Nanker revolt, Hajong revolt, Santal peasant revolt. The role of peasants in the independence movement of India and even in the independence movement of Bangladesh was in the forefront. In 1976, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (ML) formed Bangladesh Krishok Federation in order to bring the leading peasantry for struggle towards change in state regime. Since its inception Bangladesh Krishok Federation carried out different programs across the country aimed at raising issue of the right of peasants. With its works related to crises, problems and the living condition of the peasants, the main task of BKF is to arouse the sense of right and class spirit among peasants and make peasants competent militants for the realization of their rights.

The crisis of peasant and the land occupation movement in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is mainly a land of landless people. A peasant without land does is in no way recognized. He is seen as a peasant if he, for sure, owns productive land. But in Bangladesh there are 70% people who are landless. On the contrary, non-peasants unfortunately own the arable land. It is alarming that as the number of landless is increasing

day by day while the number of land possessed by non-peasants is also on the rise.

Indeed we think only peasants have the right to own the agricultural land. Since its inception in 1976, Bangladesh Krishok Federation conducted a survey on the expectation of peasants. The findings showed that every peasant families dreams to be owner of a piece of land. Based on the result of the survey, Bangladesh Krishok Federation started with off the land occupation movement in the interest of landless peasants. At the beginning of the land occupation movement, BKF realized that there was no legal protection measures for the rights of landless people. So the movement for introduction of a law in behalf of landless people continued side by side with the land occupation movements. At a certain phase of the movement in 1987, the then government introduced a manual containing the provision of the distribution and settlement of Khasland (Government owned abandoned land) among the landless people, which are so far contributing to protection initiative for the right of the landless.

In 1992, under the joint leadership of Bangladesh Krishok Federation and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha, the landless people took over 4 Khaschars (Sandy tracts which emerged from the riverbed) in their possession in Patuakhali district in the southern coastal belt of Bangladesh. It was the real start. Then the occupations of Khaschars continue one by one. Thus far, led by BKF and BKS, the landless people occupied more than 76,000 acres of Khasland throughout the country and have been living with their families permanently. Although they are constantly engaged in tough fight for their survival they have been able to sustain their occupation in the Khasland. More than 100,000 men and women are living in this occupied Khasland. According to the government census there are 3.3 million acres of Khasland in Bangladesh. In fact, the quantity of Khasland is much more. But local influential land terrorists are enjoying this Khasland illegally. Influential land terrorists and Joteder (Big land owners) remained un-evicted despite the existence of land manual and frequent government gazette notifications. The settlement process of land among the landless also remained unsettled. The land occupation movement of BKF and BKS proved that the landless people are able to be the owner of the land through systematic tough movement.

Food Sovereignty

Bangladesh Krishok Federation officially embraced the concept of food sovereignty and considered the establishment of peasant right to land by the way of occupation movement as part and parcel of the struggle for achieving food sovereignty. What we mean by food sovereignty is (1) Peasant right to land (2) Right to choose which crops to grow in the field (3) Right to use and resilience of the traditional art of farming which is nature friendly. In view of BKF the insurance of culturally appropriate and accepted food is possible through the achievement of food sovereignty.

Green Revolution

The so-called green revolution introduced in the mid-sixties has very much destroyed the traditional farming method. It introduced the cultivation of laboratories bustard (hybrid) seed promoted by multi-nationals. This aimed at bringing in the entire agricultural system under Multi-national Corporations and making the peasant totally dependent on them. So they compelled the peasants to cultivate their high hybrid seeds with different tactics. Consequently the peasants are losing their own domestic seeds and traditionally tasty and nutritious food.

Furthermore, because of green revolution the agricultural system took a different shape, which lacks social and ecological coherence. The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides negatively impacted on bio-diversity. As a result bio-diversity almost disappears. The grasses, the main feed of livestock have been damaged due to the regular use of chemical fertilizer and pesticide. The livestock is at the point of destruction as there is a big crisis of animal feed as

grasses. As the livestock is on the decline peasants are compelled to use chemical fertilizer excessively in place of manure which normally consists of cow dung coming from livestock. Cow dung also met the demand of fuel used by the peasant families. Now wood and other non-organic fuel make it up. Moreover the breeding zones of the fishes including fish itself in the swamp are almost destroyed by the poisonous effect of the chemical fertilizer and pesticide. The major portion of nutritional source of the peasant came from the different indigenous species of fishes and livestock milk and meat. Due to lack of fishes and cattle, there is an extreme nutritional crisis among the peasants. The healthy peasants are speedily becoming sick. Also, due to lack of cattle, the plough is replaced by power tiller. Artificial fish culture with hybridisation is introduced in the watersheds. As a matter of fact, the green revolution brought about devastating change in agriculture and the living style of peasants in the name of development.

GMOs

Now there is an evil move to introduce GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms). Few NGOs play a leading role to familiarize the GMOs in Bangladesh. One of the leading NGOs named BRAC is experimentally cultivating GMOs secretly in Bangladesh. They made an agreement with Monsanto but the GMO seeds are yet to be handed over to the peasants in the country.

NGOs and Micro-credit

As an efficient complement to transnational corporations (TNCs) and imperialism, NGOs capitalizing the peasants and agriculture started with usury business in the name of micro-credit and other consumer products. Victimized by micro-credit, 90% peasants are indebted in the countryside. Within a span of time peasants failed to pay back the instalment owing to skyrocketing interest rate, payment starting immediately, the week after getting the credit, arbitrarily offer of different products and hybrid seed as credit, various types of extra charges and inconsistency of instalment with income. This credit offer process gives rise to the indebted families in the rural areas. Thus micro-credit as a debt trap successfully made the medium size peasants landless and landless pauperised. Bangladesh Krishok Federation views that the usury NGOs business that create poor and poverty should be stopped for the protection of agriculture and peasants. BKF has rather promoted a genuine and comprehensive agrarian reform as well as food sovereignty that will be able to eradicate rural poverty.

Climate Change

Bangladesh is on the front line in the list of countries affected by climate change. The cyclones like devastating SIDR and Aila pauperised thousands of millions of people in Bangladesh and claimed the lives of thousands of people. On the one hand as the northern part of the country is facing deadly drought, the rivers are drying resulting in sandy islands, and a desertification process has started due to the rise of the temperature as an effect of green house gas. On the other hand, the southern part of the country is encountering overflow of the new areas because of tidal surge resulting from the rise of the sea level, sudden storm like SIDR or Aila hitting the country. Salinity and its escalation and duration in the south are on the increase resulting in substantial decline in crops production. Due to both excessive rainfall and scarcity of rain, peasants face crops failure almost every year and the durability and onslaught of cold-hot-fog are increasing alarmingly. All together, it is as if climate change was dealing with us in an unknown and uncertain mood. The majority of the people in Bangladesh still do not know what the reasons of crazy behaviours of the climate are. They even do not know the explanation of green house gas effect and the increase of global warming. They are just victim of damages: victimization of onslaught of storm surge. Most of the people feel that this sort of natural calamity is the creation of God.

Indeed, they have their right to know why they are victimized of these sufferings; why they are to be heard that within 2050 the southern part of Bangladesh go under water meeting with the sea; why they have to be climate refugees. BKF thinks that the innocent peasants have their rights to know the whole gamut of climate change; who are responsible; why this humanitarian disaster; what is its solution; what might be their (Innocent peasants) own responsibility? For this reason, Bangladesh Krishok Federation officially started working on climate since 2000 and continues.

Climate Change, Gender and Food Sovereignty Caravan

We devised the plan to hold climate change, Gender and Food Sovereignty Caravan in Bangladesh coming November 15 to 4 December 2011. The caravan of 20 days beginning from the north of the country will move through almost all affected districts and culminate in the south. Various events including seminars, workshops, meetings, exchanges of views, rallies, processions, and visits to different historical places will take place.

The representatives of peasants, indigenous, women, environment and youth organizations from different countries of south Asia including Bangladesh, the representatives of different international organizations in addition to South Asia and progressive individual will be present in the caravan. In the first place, as we will be able to reach out tens of thousands of masses of producer class, of peasants-indigenous-landless communities, with the message of climate change, Gender and Food sovereignty through this caravan and in second place we will get a clear idea about their lives, traditions, cultures, difficulties and crises. BKF is optimistic that the caravan will remain a unique thing to the toiling masses that will help them cope with the crises of climate change in future.

We, Bangladesh Krishok Federation cordially invite all of you to attend this unique caravan. Your participation and cooperation will make this caravan a success.

How Can You Help?

â€¢ 1) Through your own participation. As your participation and role will give our caravan momentum so your assistance to the caravan for your participation will help ensure the participation of one South Asian and one Bangladeshi delegate.

â€¢ (2) Through motivating your enthusiastic friends to attend the caravan if you yourself cannot take part in.

â€¢ (3) Through assisting financially one South Asian and one Bangladesh delegate for their food and accommodation in the caravan if you yourself cannot take part in.

â€¢ (4) By contributing to the caravan for making it a successful one based on your ability. Even your small contribution will play an important role for making the caravan a success.

We seek your overall assistance for the organization of the caravan.

Finally I conclude my speeches by offering invitation to all of you to visit the activities of Bangladesh Krishok Federation and the nice country Bangladesh.