

General Secretary's Report.

SILVER JUBILEE SESSION OF PUNJAB KHET MAZDOOR SABHA
HELD AT MOGA (FARIDKOT)

on September 12, 13, 14 and 15, 1980.

Delegates,

We are meeting here today in our 20th session. The Sabha had completed 25 years of its life on 13th December, 1979. The current year is therefore its Silver Jubilee Year. This session is hence Silver Jubilee Session of the Sabha. It was originally proposed to be held in the last week of March, but was postponed due to Assembly elections in the offing.

In honour of this session' History of 25 years of agricultural workers Movement has been brought out in Punjabi and English languages.

It was in this town of Moga that inaugural session of Bhartiya Khet Mazdoor Union was held in the last week of September 1968. We are proud of having hosted the session. The Union leadership has since given correct lead to the movement of agricultural workers which has grown from strength to strength. At its call 3 lac Khet Mazdoors of India staged a March and Rally at the Capital of the Country on 20th March, 1979, in support of their demands. It was an unprecedented event in the annals of the country. It is the first time that the rural proletariat in such large number had demonstrated as a class under the flag of their class organisation. Ten thousand Khet Mazdoors from Punjab had participated in the March and Rally. On Ferozpur-Delhi railway line two engines had to be used for traction of the train carrying demonstrators from Punjab.

Since its inception the Punjab Khet Mazdoor Sabha has registered considerable growth. At its inaugural session held in Khan Khanan (district Jullundur) in December, 1954, its membership was merely 15920. Now it stands at 1,28,902.

The Sabha has grown over the years through devoted service to the cause of agricultural workers and other rural poor. It has led their struggles for better wages, land, house sites, employment,

abolition of usury and for cheap credit, tax relief, availability of food and other consumer articles at fair prices, educational and medical facilities and above all end to social oppression. It has supported their movement for social, cultural and economic advance. The Sabha has fought against all forms of exploitation of rural wage workers and other rural poor. Main edge of the movement has, however, been directed against feudalism, monopoly capital and imperialism. The Sabha has lent support to genuine demands and struggles of peasantry, working class, low-paid employees, students, youth and women.

The Sabha mobilised Khet Mazdoors in joint actions with the peasantry, working class and other exploited sections- such as in historic land movement of 1970, food movement of January-March, 1959, in anti-Mehngai struggle of 1965, 1970, 1973 and in 1974 and in massive demonstrations held at Chandigarh on 13th September, 1972, and on 8th October, 1974, at Ludhiana. It also mobilised Khet Mazdoors for participation in joint March and Rally in Delhi on 27th March, 1973.

Participation by the Khet Mazdoors in joint struggles has created confidence among them that in their struggle for better life, they were not alone, but had numerous allies.

The Sabha has in particular striven to build unity of agricultural workers with toiling peasantry. Both are toilers. Both are exploited. Both are hit by high prices and taxation and other anti-people policies of the Government. Both are victims of police repression and corruption at the hands of officials. Both desire increase in agricultural production. Peasants earn more income thereby. Wage workers get more employment and favourable conditions, are created for them to win wage increase.

Both of them demand extension of educational, medical and transport facilities in the villages.

The Khet Mazdoor Sabha is interested in emergence of Kisan Sabha Units in the villages so that both Sabhas together might unite mass of rural toilers against exploitation and ^{for} better life,

and also settle wage and other disputes between them on the basis of justice to the weaker section.

The Sabha has, throughout its life, lent consistent support to the cause of world peace and national liberation struggles against Imperialism headed by U.S. Imperialism.

Internally, it has supported unity of left and democratic forces for defence of national freedom, sovereignty against internal reaction and imperialism and for democratic advance and social progress.

Some struggles and gains.

At this Silver Jubilee Session, it would be appropriate to recount certain struggles and gains of the movement and also certain concessions which the Government had to concede to the rural poor under the pressure of their electoral strength acquired on the basis of adult franchise. It is National Independence that brought them the boon of voting right in elections to Parliament, Assemblies and Panchayats. In these elections they hold the balance and could make or mar the prospects of contending parties.

These struggles, gains and concession may be enumerated as under:-

1. Increase in minimum wages.

The Sabha has led the movement of agricultural workers for better wages. The workers have won wage increase in the teeth of coercive Nakhbandis or socio-economic boycott. In the wage increase movement conducted in the three summer months of 1974 at the call of the Bhartiya Khet Mazdoor Union, they achieved average increase of 25% in the areas of movement.

Minimum wages first fixed in 1951 under Minimum Wages Act of 1948 have been upward revised five times since then. Except on one occasion, a representative of the Sabha was taken on Government appointed Minimum wages Committee. Minimum daily wages in the period has been raised from Rs. 2 in 1951 to Rs. 9.70 (in cash) in 1979. For attached workers it has risen from Rs. 360 food to Rs. 1800 plus food. Monetary wage increase has been off set to a considerable extent by rise in prices.

The Government has not so far conceded the demand of the Sabha for setting up an effective implementation machinery, a separate Inspectorate under a Deputy Labour Commissioner.

The very fixation of minimum wage rates under the law is nonetheless a moral-legal weapon in the hands of struggling Khet Mazdoors to win wage increase. Through their struggle they have won more than the minimum wages in districts of Bhatinda, Faridkot and Ferozepur, near the cities and in commercial crop areas. However, in a large number of villages in sub-montaneous districts of Hoshiarpur, Ropar and Gurdaspur they are not paid even the minimum wages. In some villages they are paid Rs. 3 or Rs. 4 a day.

The Sabha continues the agitation for setting up of effective implementation machinery, reduction in hours of work from 9 to 8 as in industry, prescription of over-time wage at double the normal rate, for attached workers rest day and holidays with pay and legislation for protection of interests of agricultural workers as in Kerala.

2. Proprietary rights over evacuee houses achieved.

In the early days of its life, the Sabha launched a movement to secure ownership rights over rural evacuee houses (houses vacated by Muslims who migrated to Pakistan) for refugee and local landless poor occupants. There were 50,000 such houses in the State. The Government at last conceded the demand and allowed poor occupants of evacuee houses worth up to Rs. 1000 a house to purchase them at Rs. 20 per house.

3. The Sabha carried on mass agitation against unjust taxes. As a result professional tax levied by District Boards on poor artisans and cycle tax were abolished. Later rural poor were also exempted from payment of chowkidara tax.

4. Support to the cause of chowkidars. The Sabha lent consistent support to the cause of village chowkidars. Punjab Chowkidar Union was in fact set up by a representative gathering of Chowkidars in the Pandal of 15th Session of the Sabha held in February 1974 at Garhshankar in Hoshiarpur district. As a result of their movement their monthly emoluments were raised to Rs. 60 per month and recently to Rs. 100. They will receive them through Money Order in their villages. They demand to be

declared as Class IV employees.

5. For grant of free house sites.

* In both Punjab and PEPSU, village Common Lands (Doh Shamilat) Acts were passed in early fifties. The Acts granted to the agricultural workers and Kamins right of ownership over their house-sites. The village common lands were declared common property of residents including the landless and vested in Gram Panchayat to be utilised for the benefit of the entire village.

* In June, 1952, Punjab Government issued instructions that land for house sites of Harijans- 5 marlas per family- be reserved at the time of Consolidation of land. Under pressure of movement, instructions were re-iterated in June, 1953, and again in April, 1955. Similar instructions were issued by PEPSU Government.

* Harijans were coopted members of Land Consolidation Advisory Committees.

Experience showed that house sites were reserved where rural poor were united and at least an advanced section of the peasantry supported them.

* Introduction of grant free house sites scheme in 1972.

Since 1955 Sabha had been agitating for fulfilment of the demand that in villages where free house sites had not been granted to the landless poor, the same should be granted out of evacuee lands near village abadi or Panchayat lands, and where such lands were not available, Government should purchase lands for the purpose at its own costs.

It is exactly on these lines that a Central Scheme for grant of free house sites to landless rural wage workers was introduced in 1972. The scheme was to be implemented within the Silver Jubilee year of Independence i.e. within 15th August 1972 and 15th August 1973. Three lac 12 thousand applications were accepted for grant of house sites.

The scheme has not however been effectively and honestly implemented by the Government. Possession of house sites has not been given to allottees in numerous cases. Sites had been allotted in many villages in unsuitable places. The Akali-Janta Government had set up a 5-member M.L.As Committee to enquire into these irregularities. But the Committee had not finished its labour before the Assembly was dissolved.

Movement has to be continued for rectification of all irregularities.

6. For extension of Welfare Schemes.

The Sabha had from the very beginning struggled for greater allocation of funds for welfare of Scheduled Castes and other backward classes in particular and other poor in general- grant of stipends from 1st Primary class, increase in the amount thereof, provision of cheap credit, financial assistance to the aged and infirm, to poor widows, orphans etc.

Stipends have in recent years been introduced in Middle Classes also for students belonging to Scheduled Castes.

The amount of old age pension had been raised from Rs. 15 to Rs. 25 and then to Rs. 50 a month. Sabha workers have helped deserving persons secure pensions.

By December, 1979, as many as 84824 old persons were in receipt of old age pensions, 20,000 in receipt of widow pensions and 5000 dependent children in receipt of financial assistance.

The movement is on for increase of monthly pension to at least Rs. 60 a month, reduction of age for eligibility to 60 years, pension for all poor disabled to work and abolition of the condition regarding earning sons.

The Government's recent decision to allow option to the beneficiaries to receive pension either through M.O. or a Bank is welcome.

The setting up of Scheduled Caste Land Development and Finance Corporation in 1970 and last year of a similar Corporation for Backward classes to advance cheap credit to these castes and classes had been a great victory for the movement.

7. For evacuee lands.

From its very inception, the Sabha had waged struggle for distribution of evacuee, Nazool and similar Government lands among agricultural workers and other landless poor.

PEPSU Government allotted 27000 acres of Nazool land to the Scheduled Caste tillers.

A prolonged and hard battle was carried on by Kisan and Khet Mazdoor Sabhas for distribution of lacs of acres of evacuee lands which Central Government had made over to the Punjab Government at nominal price, among agricultural workers and tenants, especially the abadkars who had brought them under cultivation through hard labour.

The State Government, however, after allowing Scheduled Castes occupants in 1960 to purchase 60000 acres in their possession, decided to dispose of the rest through open auction till 1964 and through restricted auction thereafter.

Punjab Khet Mazdoor and Kisan Sabhas mobilised ~~and~~ abadkars and other rural poor to resist the policy of auction. As a result of the movement, Scheduled Caste occupants were allowed to purchase evacuee lands in 1960 and 1967, they and Rai Sikhs abadkars in 1971 and 1974, and all poor abadkars irrespective of caste in 1979.

It had also been decided to allot 21280 acres of evacuee land with the & Forest Department to Scheduled Caste tillers. The process of allotment, however, is incomplete. Inferior evacuee lands with Revenue Department are being leased to Scheduled Castes for 10 years. After 5 years they can purchase them.

In 1972, Congress Government had set up 8 M.L.As Committee known as Harchand Singh Committee to enquire into complaints regarding evacuee land grab by officers and other influential persons. The Committee exposed the scandal of land grab by such persons as a result of Government's policy of auction. It recommended that such lands be retrieved and distributed among Scheduled Caste tillers. But this recommendation as not been implemented.

8. Withdrawal of Compulsory Labour Act.

In 1960 the State Government had enacted a law enabling Deputy Commissioners to mobilise unpaid labour for digging drains to overcome water-logging. No wage was to be paid to the agricultural workers. This was resurrection of old begar in a legalised form. The Sabha opposed compulsory labour. Due to resistance of workers the law remained a dead letter. In 1967 it was repealed by Punjab Vidhan Sabha.

9. Question of Land Reforms.

The only effective land reforms measures wrested by the agrarian movement in fifties in Punjab and PEPSU were laws conferring ownership rights on occupancy tenants. Inferior owners of land in Malerkotla and Faridkot States were also made superior owners.

Tenancy and Ceiling laws of Punjab and PEPSU were full of loopholes. Whatever was positive in them was sabotaged in practice.

Tenants at will were evicted on a large scale by means legal and illegal ~~xxx~~ generally by armed force with the backing of State machine in most cases.

The Kisan and Khet Mazdoor Sabhas carried on the movement for land reforms through public meetings, conferences, conventions, posters, literature, articles in news papers, Memoranda to State and Central Governments, mass demonstrations and in some cases militant physical resistance to evictions from land. Fight was also carried on inside the Legislature by representatives of the agrarian movement.

A militant land movement as part of all-India historic land movement of 1970 was launched in the State in the month of August and September, 1970. As a result of this movement, lease to Birlas of 1000 acres of land near Ropar was cancelled. A new Land Reforms Act was passed by the Assembly in December, 1972. This Act incorporated some of the demands of the movement such as unification of Punjab and PEPSU laws, application of ceiling on family basis, scrapping of exemptions from ceiling and reduction in the ceiling limit. Right was conferred in erst-while Punjab areas also on tenants with 6 years of continuous occupation to purchase their tenancy lands at concessional price of Rs. 200 per acre.

Over 2000 tenants have benefited under this concession.

This Act too was sabotaged in practice. Most of the surplus lands have been concealed under Benami transactions. No land reforms are possible without cancellation of Benami transactions.

Stay orders issued by Civil Courts including Supreme and High Courts drag on litigation for years and help sabotage the process of land reforms. Implementation of land reforms is not possible without completely debarring Civil Courts from interfering in land reform cases.

In reply to unstarred question No. 315 given in the Punjab Vidhan Sabha on 18.4.1979, it was stated that under Punjab Land Reforms Act of 1972 only 10466 hectares of land had been declared surplus (against originally estimated surplus of 40,000 hectares), of which 3071 hectares (less than one-third of declared surplus) had been allotted, but Government had taken possession of only 2535 hectares. Land mutated in favour of allottees was only 575 hectares.

This was the picture of land reforms after more than 6 years of enactment of the law.

The Punjab Khet Mazdoor Sabha at present/carrying on the agitation for plugging all loopholes in the Land Act, cancellation of all Benamis, exclusion of jurisdiction of Civil Courts in land reform cases and fool-proof implementation with cooperation of statutory popular committees representing poor beneficiaries on Kerala pattern.

10. Compensation to victims of Thresher accidents.

The Sabha had been demanding compensation to victims of thresher accidents.

The Punjab Agricultural Marketing Board in 1978 decided to grant compensation to victims of thresher accidents at the rate of Rs. 3000 for loss of one limb, Rs. 5000 for loss of two limbs and in case of death of a worker Rs. 10,000 to his dependents.

Sabha workers had helped victims of accidents to apply for compensation. 365 applicants were granted compensation for 1978 season by end of December of that year.

In 1979, the Supreme Court in a side ruling given on a decision in writ petition by some Punjab traders ruled that funds of the Markets

Board could not be spent under the law for grant of compensation to victims of thresher accidents.

The Sabha called upon the State Government to amend the law so as to off-set the adverse effect of Supreme Court ruling but it has failed to do the needful. The Sabha had demanded that in the meanwhile, Government should make provision in the Budget for grant of compensation. But it has not taken this step either.

The Sabha has been urging the State Government for many years that law should be passed making installation of safety devices on the threshing machines compulsory. The Central Government sent to the Govt. a letter dated 28.7.1978 to enact such a law. But despite lapse of over 2 years it has not taken the necessary steps in this direction.

11. Social Oppression.

The Sabha has consistently fought against all forms of social oppression, begar and police repression against the rural poor.

Rural poor, especially Scheduled Caste persons have been victims of social oppression for ages. Now as they are beginning to struggle for better life, the rural exploiters have increased social and caste oppression to beat down their struggle for better life. Social oppression takes the form of murders, beating up, rape and abduction of women, seizure of allotted lands and house sites and Nakabandis to beat down their wage struggles.

In recent years atrocities against them have increased both under Congress and Janta regimes.

Recently women have been special target of attack not only at hands of exploiters and anti-social elements, but also the police as in Narainpur and Baghat in U.P. and Dehwali in Haryana.

Numerous cases in which the Sabha came to the rescue of victims of social oppression are enumerated in the 'History of 25 years of Agricultural Workers Movement in the Punjab'.

Blood-bath in village Bath. In September, 1974, Sarpanch of vill. Bath in Tehsil Taran Tarn of district Amritsar along with his goondas armed with lethal weapons raided Harijan Basti in broad-day light and murdered four Harijans including a freedom fighter and local Khet Mazdoor leader Chaman Singh. Rally of 4000 Khet Mazdoors was held there soon

after to protest against the heinous crime. It demanded speedy arrest of culprits and deterrent punishment for them. Rs. 8000 were collected to provide relief to the bereaved families. A State-wide campaign was run on the issue. The culprits were arrested and given life imprisonment.

* The Sabha has been demanding that Nakabandi or socio-economic boycott of rural poor be declared a cognizable offence. Sabha Working Committee member and M.L.A. Sagar Singh moved a resolution in Budget session of Punjab Legislative Assembly in 1975 recommending to the Govt. to take steps to make Nakabandi a cognizable offence. The resolution was passed unanimously. But the Government has not so far taken steps to implement it.

* At the call of Bhartiya Khet Mazdoor Union, a Khet Mazdoor Demands Week was observed in the Punjab from 7th to 14th September, 1977, 'End atrocities against rural poor' was the major demand.

In observance of this week ten thousand posters were issued. In most districts jathas flag-marched through villages. Hundreds of Basti meetings were held. On the concluding day there were Dharnas at District and Sub-divisional headquarters. Faridkot district led with 311 Basti meetings, 67 other public meetings and 12 jathas marching through 321 villages. 15th September was observed as anti-atrocity day. On that day, rallies and demonstrations were held at many places. One thousand demonstrated at Mukatsar and Jullundur each.

* Memorandum to Parliamentary Committee on Untouchability.

A Bill had been introduced in 1972 to amend the Anti-Untouchability law in order to make it more effective. Parliament had set up a committee to make suitable recommendations. The Committee visited Punjab on 15th and 16th September, 1972. A deputation of the Sabha met the Committee at Jullundur on 16th September and submitted to it a written Memorandum. The Memorandum demanded that anti-Untouchability law be made more stringent. Nakabandi be brought within its purview or a separate legislation be passed to make it a cognizable offence. Stress was laid on speedy economic uplift of Scheduled Castes in order to eradicate all vestiges of untouchability.

* At the time of Govindan Nair's proposed fast before Parliament in 1979 against atrocities against Harijans, six thousand copies of his Appeal translated into Punjabi were distributed. Telegrams were sent to the Prime Minister in support of his demand by State and district Sabhas, numerous wehra meetings were held all over the State. It was decided that a jatha of 100 led by Sabha President Bhan Singh Bhaura should offer satyagraha before Parliament at the time of his fast. The Government accepted the substance of his demand in time.

* An A.S.I. of Police Station Balachaur, district Hoshiarpur had, at the instance of Sarpanch of village Sanghomajra, beaten up a number of agricultural workers and forced them to execute a promote of Rs. 1500 in favour of the Sarpanch. Our Sabha President sent a complaint to the I.C. Police and district S.P. Thereupon the A.S.I. was transferred and F.I.R. against him registered.

Since the 19th Session. Participation in Delhi March and Rally.

The 19th session of the Sabha held in Patran district Patala towards the end of February, 1979, gave a stirring call to the Khet Mazdoors of Punjab to participate in the March and Rally of agricultural workers of the country on 20th March for which a call had been given by Bhartiya Khet Mazdoor Union.

The increasing atrocities had sent a wave of shock and indignation among agricultural workers all over the country. At the call of B.K.M.U, 3 lac agricultural workers most of them with torn clothes and bare-footed staged a protest March on 20th March, 1979, from Red Fort to the Boat Club where a rally was held. A charter of Khet Mazdoor demands was presented to Central Government and Parliament. The Rally called upon the rural poor all over the country to unite under banner of their class organisation to put an end to atrocities and the socio-economic causes underlying them.

It was a historic March and Rally unprecedented in the annals of the agrarian movement. It was the first time in history that the class of agricultural workers had marched under the flag of their own class organisation in such a massive demonstration in support of their demands.

Ten thousand Khet Mazdoors from Punjab participated in the said March and Rally.

Such was the rush of demonstrators from Ferozepur, Faridkot and Bhatinda districts that two engines had to be harnessed to pull the railway train from Ferozepur to Delhi. Even then the train could move slowly and was late by three hours in reaching the destination. Many Khet Mazdoors were disappointed for they could not be accommodated even on roof of the train.

In preparation for the March and rally the Sabha issued and distributed 25 thousand hand bills, Wehra meetings were held in numerous villages. Jullundur district collected 15 thousand and Ludhiana district 11.5 thousand rupees to meet the expenses in connection with journey of demonstrators.

Faridkot, Ludhiana and Ferozepur district over fulfilled their quotas of demonstrators for Delhi March. Some districts lagged behind their quotas. District Faridkot sent 2164 to Delhi against quota of 2000, Ludhiana 615 against quota of 500 and Ferozepur 1275 against quota of 1000.

The demonstrators from Faridkot included 58 women and those from Bhatinda 50 women. Demonstration of Faridkot came from 208 villages.

The demonstrators from Punjab came back highly inspired by the tremendous success of the March, growing class unity of rural proletariat and rising influence of their class organisation - Bhartiya Khet Mazdoor Union.

Participation in New Delhi Convention.

The sharpening class struggle in the countryside has led to all kisan and agricultural workers' organisation coming together to defend the cause of the down-trodden rural poor.

An All-India convention of agricultural workers was held at New Delhi on 23.10.1979. It was sponsored by B.K.M.U., C.P.M. led All-India Kisan Sabha, Indian National Rural Labour Federation and Hind Khet Mazdoor Panchayat. The sponsors had prepared an agreed resolution for the convention.

Participation in New Delhi Convention

The Convention raised a strong voice of protest against atrocities

It adopted a comprehensive resolution demanding Central Legislation

to protect interests of agricultural workers.

37 representatives of Punjab Khet Mazdoor Sabha and 23 of

Delhi Mazdoor Sabha attended the Convention.

It was proposed that similar conventions be held in the States.

Joint Convention in Punjab.

A joint convention of representatives of Khet Mazdoor

sponsored by Punjab Khet Mazdoor and Dhati Mazdoor Sabhas was held

at Ludhiana on 30.3.1980. About 600 delegates attended the session.

Among them were 360 representatives of Punjab Khet Mazdoor Sabha against

a quota of 330 allotted to the districts.

The convention adopted a charter of Khet Mazdoor demands almost

on all the issues facing the movement. wages, social oppression, credit,

land, price rise and need for comprehensive Public Distribution system,

social welfare measures, free legal aid etc. The convention raised a

strong voice of protest against atrocities and adopted a special

resolution on the subject.

Previous to the holding of the convention, representatives of

the two sabhas had met and adopted an agreed draft of Resolution.

Representatives of both Sabhas almost from all districts made speeches in

the convention in support of the Resolution. Proceedings and decisions

of the convention revealed that there was almost complete identity of

views among leaders and ranks of the two Sabhas on issues facing the

movement and how to solve them.

The Convention inspired them all for joint action. The leaders

and workers of the two Sabhas had a common history of the movement from

1954 to 1964 when the unfortunate split took place.

Joint Deputation meets Punjab Governor.

Punjab being under presidential rule, a joint deputation of the

two Sabhas on behalf of Ludhiana Convention met the Governor, Punjab, on

11.4.1980 and presented him a Memorandum of Khet Mazdoor Demands based

on resolutions passed in the convention.

On the subject of ending social oppression, the Memorandum demanded:-

" Effective steps should be taken to end social oppression in all forms, Nakabandi be declared an offence in terms of the resolution unanimously passed by Punjab Vidhan Sabha in its Budget Session of 1975. An effective Police machinery be set up to render effective protection to weaker sections. The Deputy Commissioners and sub-divisional officers (Civil) and Police Heads at District and sub-divisional levels be made personally responsible for protection of rural poor".

"The agricultural workers' movement is fully conscious that the source of social oppression is the existing socio-economic set-up in the country and that without the elimination of remnants of feudalism social oppression cannot be ended".

Therefore the Memorandum demanded radical land reforms in the following words:-

" To break the back of feudalism which is the main source of social oppression radical land reforms be introduced on Kerala and West Bengal pattern with the cooperation of representative Committees of rural poor."

Observance of 25th Anniversary of Sabha's foundation.

In pursuance of decision of the Working Committee, 13th December, 1979, was observed as 25th anniversary Day of Sabha's foundation.

Wehra meetings, general body meetings of Khet Mazdoor workers were held in districts to explain to them the significance of the Day and growth and gains of the Khet Mazdoor movement in these 25 years.

The best organised observance was reported from Faridkot district. 275 attended the General body meeting at Moga, Numerous Wehra meetings were held in the villages in all sub-divisions. In many villages, sabha flags were hoisted on roof-tops.

In Patran district Patiala 500 Khet Mazdoors from 58 villages attended the meeting and Rs. 2500 were collected for the purpose. Thirty Wehra meetings were held in this connection. General body meetings were held in Patiala, and in Barnala in Sangrur district. In Jullundur district 300 posters were issued and beside a general body meeting at Nakodar, conferences were held in three places.

In Ludhiana three General body meetings were held and 28 wehra meetings.

In Hoshiarpur district nine general body meetings were held.

In Bhatinda district a public meeting was held in Mansa.

In Amritsar district, a poster was issued and general body meetings were held in many villages.

Struggle for land

The Sabha conducted agitation through conferences, wakra meetings, dharnas and hunger-strikes on the question, in particular for distribution of evacuee lands. Akali Revenue Minister Umra Nangal had issued an order staying the disposal of evacuee lands. The State Government, however, lifted the stay early in January, 1979. It decided that all abadkars in occupation of evacuee lands since Rabi 1976 could purchase them up to 5 acres (later extended to 10 acres) including their own land, if any.

The Sabha had welcomed this decision, but had demanded that in case of dispute regarding possession, it should be decided by on the spot verification and all arrears of rent and other dues be written off.

It further demanded that inferior evacuee lands which had been put at disposal of Revenue Department be sold to the lease-holders and balance of these lands be allotted to deserving Scheduled Caste tillers.

The Government later decided to sell 29073 acres of this land to the lease-holders and up to 10 acres to others who had been in occupation thereof since Rabi 1976.

The State Government also decided about this time to allot the balance of 17936 acres of evacuee land with the Forest Department to Scheduled Caste tillers. Both these decisions were taken after Sabha deputation had met the Chief Minister. But these decisions of the Govt. were not being implemented.

The work of implementation of land reforms had also come to a standstill under Umra Nangal who openly propogated the view that no ceiling should be applied to agricultural land until it was applied also to urban property.

The extended meeting of the Working Committee held at Malerkotla on 12th and 13th May, 1979 decided to launch agitation on land question.

In accordance with the decision of the Working Committee, a Memorandum on land question was submitted to the Chief Minister on 17.7.1979.

Mass deputations of the Sabha met the Deputy Commissioners and Sub-divisional officers (Civil) on 25th July, 1979. Dharnas were held on the same day at many places.

Flag marches were to be conducted in villages where surplus and evacuee lands lay in the first week of September and chain Dharnas and hunger-strikes from 11th September on 11th to 15th September Dharnas and 16th to 20th September hunger-strikes.

In this land agitation, Faridkot Sabha conducted flag march in 30 villages. 80 wehra meetings were held and 10 public meetings. Posters were distributed. A convention attended by 300 was held at Nihalsinghwala. A demonstration was held at Faridkot. Dharnas were held at Mukatsar and two other places.

In Ludhiana district 3 joint conventions were held at Mangal Tandi, Machhiwara and Sidhwan Bet in which Kisan Sabha and C.P. (M) led Kisan and Dihati Mazdoor Sabhas also participated.

Dharnas and hunger strikes were held at Ludhiana. In Amritsar district Dharnas and hunger-strikes took place on evacuee land question. 111 Khet Mazdoors from 40 villages participated in them.

In Patiala district hunger strike was held at Nabha, Sirhind and Samana.

In Bhatinda district 250 Khet Mazdoors participated in Dharna at Bhatinda. Hunger-strikes took place at 4 places.

In Hoshiarpur district 20 wehra meetings and two conferences were held on the land issue. At Garhshanker Dharnas were held for 5 days and hunger strike for 4 days.

In Gurdaspur district flag-march was conducted in Govindpur Bet area where large chunks of evacuee land are situated. A number of wehra meetings were held. Dharnas and hunger-strikes were also held for some days.

Dharnas and hunger-strikes took place at Sangrur-11th to 15th September Dharnas and 18th to 20th September hunger strike.

In Ferozepur district three conventions were held in Zira sub-division on the question of evacuee land. Dharnas were held at Ferozepur,

In Jullundur district, Dharnas were held at Jullundur and Kapurthala from 11th to 15th September and hunger strikes from 17th to 20th September.

Meeting the Chief Minister once more.

after the movement was over, a Sabha deputation met the Chief Minister in connection with evacuee land question. The Deputation told him that Government's decision were not being implemented by the officials concerned. He called in Financial Commissioner Revenue and other concerned officers and asked them to get the Government decisions implemented.

Last dates to apply for grant of ownership right to lessees of inferior evacuee land was extended to 30th December, 1979.

Cases of social oppression.

Many cases of social oppression took place in the period under review. In some cases, the police helped the oppressors. In some cases police itself was the main culprit.

In villages Hassanpur, Jhandi and Karhali of district Patiala harassment of Harijans continues. There was call attention motion in Vidhan Sabha in respect of village Hassanpur. An M.L.A.s Committee visited the village and held enquiries into Sarpanch-led party breaking up a meeting of Khet Mazdoors. The Committee held the local H.S.O. responsible for instigating the trouble. The Chief Minister himself basing on the police version white-washed the whole affair by blaming the C.P.M. The trouble continues.

In cases of murders that took place in village Khuranj in Fazilka sub-division of Ferozepur district and in village Tungan distt. Patiala, the culprits have been allowed to go scot-free.

In village Khuranj the employer with the help of some goondas killed his 'siri' on 7th September, 1979. Culprits were not brought to book. In the same village already a Khet Mazdoor Kulia had been murdered and his dead body disposed of.

In village Tungan in Patiala district, a U.P. labourer Jit Singh was murdered by his employer. Oil was poured on his dead body to burn it up.

Our Sabha President had visited the village to make enquiries and apprised the authorities of the facts. Culprit was however not punished.

In village Madlewala in Muktsar Police Station chaukidar Bakhtawar Singh was murdered. The murderers also killed his two buffaloes. The Police did not even care to get postmortem done of victim's dead body.

20 Labourers from U.P. held as virtual prisoners.

In village Chak Mughlani Tehsil Nakodar of district Jullundur a landlord held 20 labourers from U.P. as virtual prisoners. They were made to work hard during the day and kept under guard at night so that none of them should stray away. They were given only rice to eat. The Sabha workers got them released from the grip of the landlord through intervention of the Police.

Land grabbing

In village Ghonewal district Gurdaspur, an Akali leader Swaran Singh, then an M.L.A., grabbed the evacuee land which had been in possession of Khet Mazdoors. The authorities did nothing to restore the said land to the poor people who had been in occupation thereof.

In village Bhilawal district Amritsar the village Panchayat was the culprit that evicted Scheduled Caste occupants from evacuee land which had been in their possession for 25 years. The houses built by them on the land were demolished. The authorities gave no relief to the victims.

The district authorities themselves were responsible for evicting Harijans from some land in Jago Bangar in district Gurdaspur. On 27.7.1979 a strong Police force was sent to the village. A police tout Sohnan Singh was assisted by the police physically to construct a house on the grabbed land. The Police wantonly lathi charged the rural poor who resisted eviction and injured many of them. The victims were also challaned in criminal cases. A private complaint was filed against Police official in a low court. Both cases are still pending.

On 7.8.79 a demonstration of 2000 peasants and Khet Mazdoors was held at Gurdaspur to protest against Police atrocities at Jago Bangar. Deputations of state and district leaders met I.G. Police and also the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister deputed D.I.G. (Jullundur) to hold enquiries. But no redress was forthcoming for victims of atrocities.

Virtual Kidnapping of a Harijan Boy.

One Major P.S. Kahlon forcibly took away a Harijan boy Sadhu Ram s/o Kartar Chand of village Sagar pur in district Gurdaspur to the place of his posting in Himachal Pradesh and virtually made him his bond-slave. Deputations of the Sabha consisting of State and district leaders met the Chief Minister and I.G. Police and gave them written Memoranda and also a written complaint from his father. When the said Major came to know of charges against him, he lodged an F.I.R. at Police Station Dharmsala complaining that his domestic-servant Sadhu Ram had run away from his house after stealing some articles. The whereabouts of the boy are not known so far.

Killing of a Harijan's pigs.

In village Nabipur in district Toper, a goonda had killed some pigs of a Harijan. The Sabha workers took up the issue. The matter was compromised with the culprit paying Rs. 700 as compensation.

In Bhatinda district Sabha workers secured release of a bond slave from clutches of a money-lending shop-keeper after bondage of 25 years.

Some wage struggles.

In village Phide Khurd of Fawidkot district employers enforced Nakabandi to cut down cotton-picking wage from Rs. 1.50 to Rs. 1.25 per panseri (5 kilos). But at last workers through their strike struggle secured wage at Rs. 1.75 per panseri of cotton picked.

In Gurdaspur district, there were wage disputes over transplan-tation and threshing of paddy in villages Gajju Gaj, Sanghera, Basantkot Dalloha and Paslan. Workers were victorious.

In Sangrur district there were wage struggles and Nakabandis in villages Hadyaya and Sanghera. In Sanghera daily wage was increased to Rs. 9 plus food.

In Bhatinda district Nakabandis were enforced against workers in villages Birjoke Kalan and Dalewala to cut down cotton-picking wage rates. The workers defeated the wage cut offensive.

In Jullundur district through strike struggle workers won wage increases in village Burki Kalan from Rs. 8 without food to Rs. 8 with food a day.

In Binjon of district Hoshiarpur through struggle workers got their daily wage increased from Rs. 6 to Rs. 8 + food per day.

In village Hanumangarh district Ferozepur workers won wage increase from Rs. 8 plus food to Rs. 10 plus food. In village Ishamohan they opposed successfully attempt of employers to cut down wages rates.

Distribution of plots for house-sites.

As a result of initiative taken by the Sabha, 2 acres of land near Sangrur railway station was distributed free for house sites of landless wage workers. Number of plots was later increased to 120.

In Sahnewal district Bhatinda, 54 plots for house-sites were got distributed among khet mazdoors.

Mass deputations met S.D.O (Civil) Garhshankar in district Hoshiarpur and got house sites distributed in four villages. In village Golewala, possession was secured with the help of Police.

In Ferozepur district 35 house-sites were got distributed in Burj Hamingarh.

In Ludhiana district possession of house sites was secured in villages Ramgarh Sardaran and Sohian.

In Sangrur district in village Dhurkot 97 plots were got distributed and in village Niamatpur 45 plots were changed to a more suitable places.

Constructive Work.

District Units carried on constructive work like helping deserving persons apply for and secure old age and widow pensions, financial assistance to dependent children, Corporation loans in general and interest free loans in particular and also MAFAL subsidies for dairy, poultry and piggery. M.L.A. members of the Working Committee Sarwan Singh, Dana Ram and Lumba and Sagar Singh put in much effort

In Toper district MAFAL grants were secured for 20 persons and applications were sent from 5 villages for interest-free loans.

In Faridkot district through M.L.As and other-wise numerous applications were sent up for pensions and loans.

In Bhatinda district, 75 applications for old age pensions, 180 for financial assistance to dependent children and 7 for those disabled and 300 for Corporation loans were sent up. Rs. 150 were secured from Red Cross as financial assistance to two needy Khet Mazdoors.

In Hoshiarpur district 15 applications were sent up for old age and widow pensions, five for financial assistance to dependent children, 11 applications for house-construction grants and 43 for grants for rope-making machines.

In Ferozepur district besides work in this connection done by M.L.A. Sarwan Singh, Working Committee member Atma Singh helped 25 persons apply for old age pensions and 6 for ~~xxx~~ loans to purchase camel carts.

In Gurdaspur district, old age pensions were secured for 9 persons.

In Ludhiana district 200 persons were helped to apply for Corporation loans, 30 for old age pensions, 16 for financial assistance to dependent children and ~~xxx~~ 9 for widow pensions. Rupees one lac were secured as subsidy from MAFAL.

In Amritsar district, applications^{from}~~xxx~~ 14 villages were sent up for Corporation loans.

Officials compelled to return graft money.

The Police of Goraya Police Post in Jullundur district had extracted a bribe of Rs. 1000 from some persons of village Nanamajra. The Sabha exposed this corruption of the Police. The police officer in charge of the Post himself came to the village and returned graft money to the persons concerned.

In district Ludhiana, field officials of the Corporation had taken a bribe of Rs. 1100 from applicants for interest-free loans. There was great agitation. In Memorandum submitted to the Governor on 11.4.80 the two Sabhas had brought to his notice corrupt practices indulged in by Corporation officials in Ludhiana district. The officials concerned

returned the graft money to the applicants concerned.

Helping to set up District Chaukidara Union.

The Bhatinda Khet Mazdoor Sabha workers helped in setting up District Chaukidara Union.

They also rendered support to the Palledar agitation.

~~They~~ In Amritsar district, a T.U. school of 40 Khet Mazdoors was held. It was addressed by Khet Mazdoor and Trade Union leaders.

Below is given the table showing enrolment quota and actual enrolment of membership for 1979-80 and enrolment for 1978-79.

District.	Enrolment quota for 1979-80	Actual enrolment in 1979-80	Enrolment in 1978-79.
1. Faridkot	40,000	41,110	35,112
2. Amritsar	15,000	10,100	10,000
3. Ferozepur	20,000	13,800	13,000
4. Bhatinda	16,000	10,500	12,483
5. Jullundur	12,500	7,050	10,000
6. Hoshiarpur	6,000	4,747	4743
7. Gurdaspur	6,500	5,636	4,537
8. Sangrur	12,500	9,467	10,000
9. Patiala	10,000	9,950	7,000
10. Ropar	8,500	8,742	8,005
11. Ludhiana	13,000	8,000	7,500
Total	1,60,000	1,28,902	1,22,577

Faridkot district leads all other districts in growth of organisation and movement. Its enrolment exceeds the quota by 1110 and last year's enrolment by 5,998. At the tail comes Hoshiarpur with enrolment of 4,747. Except Faridkot and Ropar, no other district has fulfilled the quota. But besides Faridkot, many other districts have exceeded last year's enrolment. These districts are Amritsar, Ferozepur, Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur, Patiala, Ropar and Ludhiana. Districts of Bhatinda, Jullundur and Sangrur have fallen short of their last year's enrolment. Growth of the organisation and movement is uneven.

Total enrolment is much less than the quota but exceeds last year's enrolment by 6,325.

Best functioning district unit continues to be Faridkot. The office of the Sabha issued 21 circulars to lower units in this period. After each meeting of the Working Committee, a circular was issued indicating attendance of members and giving decisions taken by the meeting, some other circulars were also issued such as in connection with Delhi March and Convention, Ludhiana Convention, Free legal aid to the poor. Thirteen meetings of the Working Committee were held in this period. An extended meeting of the Working Committee attended by forty was held at Malerkotla on 12th and 13th May, 1979, to discuss Sabha organisation.

Future tasks:-

1. To carry forward the process of united action with Punjab Dehati Mazdoor Sabha which was initiated at joint convention at Ludhiana at district and lower levels, on various issues of the movement.
2. To further develop the movement in the State on issues of wages, social oppression, land, house sites, cheap credits, social security and employment etc.
3. To stream-line the Sabha organisation by better functioning of Committees at all levels. Compulsory election of village Committees after enrolment.
4. To lay greater stress on constructive work to secure relief for the poor sections from social Welfare and Security measures, from MAFAL and free legal aid to the poor scheme.
5. To continue to lend support to the demands and movement of other exploited sections, and to mobilise Khet Mazdoors in ever increasing numbers in joint actions with other toiling masses.
6. To conduct a series of schools and G.B. meetings to educate the cadre and militants of the movement in coming months.