Chapter - IV

AGRARIAN PRESSURE GROUPS: TECHNIQUES AND FUNCTIONING

The techniques and functioning of pressure groups vary from country to country and system to system. The actual influence of pressure groups in a political system depends upon the range of activities entrusted to the government. If the government keeps off the economic arena, pressure groups have little to do inspite of their skilled techniques, but in case the range of activities is widespread and the state is a welfare oriented then the pressure groups get stimulated.¹

Pressure groups have a number of techniques to pressurise the government. Each tactic has unique cost and benefit associated with its utilization. Tactics are inextricably tied to strategies of influence. There are two aspects of lobbying strategy "A public interest group must often decide if it will enter into a working arrangement with other organisation for co-operative strategy or it will go alone on an issue".² Jeffery categorises tactics and techniques into three types.³ (1) Those which are

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characterised by direct communication between lobbyists and governmental officials. (ii) The methods by which groups lobby through their constituents. (iii) The groups may try to change governmental policy by influencing elections or by altering public opinion.

The choice of a particular tactic and a technique depends upon the type of governmental structure, ethos of the political system and the nature of pressure groups.\textsuperscript{4} In Indian society the choice of the pressure techniques are determined not only by the prevailing structure of political system but also by the socio-economic infrastructure and the intra-extra societal environments.

"In India, pressure groups have been directed towards influencing the administration and implementation of policy rather than its formation. Its great success has been achieved in forestalling certain government actions, and in modifying policy rather than in initiating it. It is at the state and local administrative levels that officials have been particularly responsive to such pressures".\textsuperscript{5}

The strategies like peaceful demonstrations, deputations, representations and resolutions do not carry

any weight unless they are supported by the organised groups. So far the agrarian pressure groups in Punjab are concerned, they use various types of tactics and techniques like Morcha, Gherao, Bandh, Rasta Roko, Jail Bharo and many more to safeguard the interests of the peasants of Punjab.

Apolitical peasant organisations, like Punjab Zimindara Union, Zimindara Federation of India, All India Zimindara Front, Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union and Punjab wing of Bhartiya Kisan Union have been quite active and operative as pressure groups in Punjab during the period, under study. They also adopted various tactics and techniques to achieve their objectives.

I

Punjab Zimindara Union and Zimindara Federation of India (PZU and ZFI)

One of the prominent agricultural pressure groups had been Punjab Zimindara Union (PZU). It launched various agitations for the socio-economic justice for the farmers. In 1968, it took up the issue regarding the growing tendency of black market in the tractors and their spare parts. The tractor owners were being compelled by the authorised dealers to purchase the spare parts from their agencies only. The
fact was that these spare parts were available at more reasonable rates in the market. The union tried to tackle this problem at their own level, but the dealers did not bother. As the efforts of the union went unheaded, it strongly condemned the dealers and handed over a memorandum to the Director, Punjab Agro Industries, Jalandhar. When even this was unresponsive, the Union decided to take up the matter at a higher level. Gurmukh Singh Sidhu, President of the Union led a five member deputation and met the Governor of Punjab. The Governor gave them attention and assured full justice. The government swung into action and consequently, the management of the Punjab Agro-Industries Corporation gave a written assurance to look into the interests of the farmers by checking such mal-practices. They also allowed the tractor owners to purchase the spare parts from the open market.

In 1970, Punjab Zimindara Union took up some issues like the abolition of Estate Duty Act and Wealth Tax on the agriculturists. The union condemned these taxes seriously. It is because burden of these taxes was to further deteriorate their economic conditions. They observed a complete hartal (strike) by ceasing supplies to the urban areas on May 26-27, 1970. They also observed a protest day on July 4, 1970 and forced the Union Government to resolve their problems. As

7. Balbir Singh Sohal, Sales Manager, Punjab Agro Industries, Jalandhar. Sept. 9, 1970. For reference see Appendix No. II.
these issues were part of the state list and the Central Government was trying to impose these taxes, the state government opposed this move vehemently. The then Chief Minister of Punjab Parkash Singh Badal assured full support to the demands of the peasants. M.S. Randhawa also supported this viewpoint.  

The struggle continued. Various rallies, dharnas and agitations were organised in various districts of Punjab. The farmers continued pressurising the central government by passing various resolutions. After all, on May 31, 1972, the Central Government sent R.B. Chadda, Joint Secretary to the Government of India to Patiala to look into the problems of the agriculturists, who were liable to wealth tax. He gave a patient-hearing to the representatives of the union and forwarded a favourable recommendation. Consequently, the government decided to withdraw the imposition of wealth tax on the agriculturists.

In 1970, one of the stiffest struggles given by the union was 'challans of the tractors'. The situation sparked off when the police challaned a tractor, whose owner had refused to pay bribe to the police-man. The tractor owner when resisted, the situation flared up. The union took up the issue and demanded that the tractors

9. Ibid.

10. Telegram, "Comintax" vide No. Agr WT/1972/5618 May 9, 1972. For reference see Appendix No. III.
should not be challaned as they are meant for agricultural purposes only. When this demand was not accepted, they started gheraoing the police stations and gave a tough time to the administration. Harmit Singh Kang, the President of the local unit of Punjab Zimindara Union, Mandi Gobindgarh (Patiala) led a deputation and met Justice Gurnam Singh, the then Chief Minister of Punjab, in Chandigarh. He made him aware of the gravity of the situation. The personal intervention by the chief minister helped to resolve the issue. Ultimately, a law was enacted not to challan the tractors. This law is in force till this day, in Punjab.

The union had always been fighting for the remunerative prices of agricultural products. In this connection, they had been constantly sending memoranda to the Union Agriculture Minister and Agricultural Price Commission. Similarly in 1972, when the remunerative prices of wheat were not being given to the farmers, the union demanded for fair compensation. They started organising rallies one after the other. At last, they reached Delhi and about 1800 farmers demonstrated a dharma in front of the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi's residence. She ultimately, agreed and announced Rs.5 as a bonus on per quintal of wheat. Thus, the

12. Gurmukh Singh Sidhu, President, Punjab Zimindara Union (PZU) wrote one such letter to Union Agriculture Minister on July 18, 1970. The reply of this letter is attached in Appendix. See Appendix No. I.
farmers of Punjab were benefited to the tune of twenty crores of rupees. In the same way in 1973, they were able to pressurise the Union Agriculture Minister Faqrudin-Ali-Ahmed and succeeded in getting Rs. 70 instead of Rs. 54 for per quintal of paddy.

In 1974, the union took up the issue of uneven distribution of diesel and its black marketing. The deputation of the union met the then chief minister, Giani Zail Singh on March 2, 1974. He assured them proper distribution of diesel. But in September 1979, the union along with its sisterly organisation Zimindara Federation of India (ZFI) compelled the government to take stiff action against those who were indulging in the black marketing of diesel. Ultimately, the other peasant organisations also supported. Akali-Janata alliance was in power in the state. Ultimately, the government challaned about hundred petrol pumps owners to smoothen the supply of diesel.

Another pronounced feature of Punjab Zimindara Union and Zimindara Federation of India has been to take up the issues relating to the expensive and lengthy procedure of judicial courts. They organised many agitations in this context. Their plea was that the courts take lot of time to

14. Ibid., p. 11.
grant justice to the litigants, amounting to the fact that justice delayed - justice denied. They demanded that the court timings should be fixed in such a way, so that much time of the agriculturists was not wasted. They advocated for two shift system - forenoon and afternoon.16

Their estimate was that about 50,00017 peasants appear before the various courts of Punjab daily. For saving the time, energy and money of those who were the worst victim of this judicial procedure, the union resorted to agitations. They sent the big jathas for courting arrests at various places in Punjab. They also staged dhamas before the police stations. They attempted to gherao the courts. For highlighting their demands, they issued and published various papers and pamphlets. Their main plea was that the agriculturists were to work daily for their livelihood. If they wasted much of their time in the courts their survival would become difficult.18 The leaders of these unions Master Gurmukh Singh and Raghbir Singh led a deputation and met the then chief justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court on August 2, 1979. The chief justice gave directives vide order No. 1848 Gen-1/L-23 that pre-lunch and after lunch, 'cause lists' system should be introduced. He further ordered that these lists should be displayed a day in advance

18. Ibid.
so that unnecessary inconvenience to the litigants may be avoided. Thus, Punjab Zimindara Union and Zimindara Federation of India played a vital role in sowing the seeds of New innovation of Judiciary which are now popularly known as 'Lok Adalats'.

All India Zimindara Front (AIZF)

All India Zimindara Front (AIZF) was an off-shoot of Punjab Zimindara Union and Zimindara Federation of India. It was founded on the doctrines of Sir Chottu Ram. It fought at many fronts against corruption and black marketing. The Front condemned the corrupt practices of the brokers and the procurement officers in the grain markets. The situation sparked off when some people were caught red handed while they were weighing less in Khumano Kanak Mandi (grain market). The local members of the union gheraoed these people and lodged their report to the local police. They did not lift the gherao till the fair compensation was agreed upon and the concerned persons were taken into police custody. A popular slogan of the union at that time was 'Hukam Deo Jawana Nu, Phardo Haji Mastana Nu' (Order to arrest all those who are corrupt like Haji Mastan).

21. Ibid.
In June 1980, the soaring prices of the fertilizers and other agricultural inputs squeezed the margin of profit of the farmers. All India Zimindara Front, immediately took up the matter and asked the government to withdraw this hike of rates in the fertilizers. The union organised an agitation and staged a dharna in front of the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Patiala. Harmit Singh Kang led a deputation of five persons and met Union Agricultural Minister Rao Birender Singh on June 22, 1980. The minister gave the assurance that the proper subsidy would be given on the increased rates of fertilizers. Similarly the union fought for the proper subsidy on the agricultural implements. It also highlighted the malpractice being committed in the disbursement of subsidies. The Front also contributed substantially in the Sanjha Morcha, which was launched to fight against the increasing rates of agricultural inputs and agricultural implements.

The union was in a position to play a remarkable role in highlighting agricultural issues, as it owned a printing press. Harmit Singh Kang who was the union President and also the editor of the paper 'Wahikar Yug' used this press as an instrument for pressurising the government. The Wahikar Yug had become very popular with the rural people of

The Various Issues Taken up by the Agricultural Pressure Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Agricultural Pressure Groups</th>
<th>Name of issue</th>
<th>Techniques adopted</th>
<th>Year/Period</th>
<th>Name of the Party in power and the name of the Chief-Minister</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PZU</td>
<td>Black marketing of tractors and their spare parts</td>
<td>Resolutions</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Akali-Jan Sangh (P.S. Badal)</td>
<td>Written assurance to the farmers (Succeeded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZU</td>
<td>Wealth Tax and Estate Duty on Agriculturists</td>
<td>Ceasing supplies</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Akali-Jan Sangh (P.S. Badal)</td>
<td>Succeeded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZU</td>
<td>Challans of Tractors</td>
<td>Personal Contact and Gherao</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Akali Dal (Justice Gurnam Singh)</td>
<td>Succeeded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZU</td>
<td>Remunerative prices of wheat and paddy</td>
<td>Deputations and Demonstrations</td>
<td>1972-73</td>
<td>Congress (Giani Zail Singh)</td>
<td>Succeeded in getting bonus for wheat, and higher procurement price for paddy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZU</td>
<td>Black marketing of Diesel</td>
<td>Deputation Personal Contact</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Congress (Giani Zail Singh)</td>
<td>Only assurance by the Govt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZU + ZFI</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Gherao Rasta Roko</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Akali-Janata (P.S. Badal)</td>
<td>100 dealers were challaned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZU + ZFI</td>
<td>Cause list in Judicial courts</td>
<td>Personal-Contact Deputations</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Akali-Janata (P.S. Badal)</td>
<td>Succeeded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIZF</td>
<td>Subsidies on Fertilizers and Agricultural Implements</td>
<td>Dhama Deputations Press</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Akali-Janata (P.S. Badal)</td>
<td>An assurance to the farmers.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Mandi Gobindgarh, Patiala, Ludhiana and Nabha. That way, the press of the union played dual role as it pressurised the government on one hand and worked miraculously to awaken the peasants of this area on the other. David B. Truman has rightly observed that Press has a very significant role to disseminate the desired information when other courses do not seem to be advantageous.23

The various issues taken up, the techniques adopted and the outcome of the struggle of these unions have been tabulated in Table 4.1.

It is vividly clear from Table 4.1 that the various peasant unions had been resolving their agricultural issues by influencing the government through mild strategies like resolutions, memoranda, deputations, personal contacts and personal influence. The propaganda through their press also had been playing a vital role in awakening the peasantry and in raising their voice against the government. They used stiff strategies very sparingly. The outcome of these agitations had been more favourable for the peasant unions when Akali party was in political power in the state rather than Congress. Initially, the union had been taking up localised issues, but later on they started widening their windows.

Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (PKZU)

Immediately, after its emergence Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (PKZU) started working with a great vigour. The union workers, Amrik Singh, Jagdish Singh, Harchand Singh, Dumon Singh and Guman Singh under the leadership of Manmohan Singh Hawas, threw the pamphlets in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, from the visiting gallery with the objective to attract the attention of the government towards the problems of the peasants. They also raised slogans against the anti-agriculturists policies of the government. They were specially emphasising for the remunerative prices of wheat. The situation arose when Comrade Sat Pal Dang gave the statement that the rates given to the farmers for wheat were quite remunerative and the farmers were enjoying profits because of the introduction of the High Yielding Varieties of seeds. The Congress party was in power in the state and the union was not getting any support from any corner but for Shiromani Akali Dal, which is more or less a regional political party of the farmers.

In March 1973, when the Central Government did not raise the support price of wheat, the union grew stiffer and decided to stop selling the wheat in the grain markets.

They decided to withhold this sale till June 15, 1973. The government got panicky and readily agreed to pay bonus on wheat to the tune of Rs. 5 per quintal. The situation took a serious turn when in 1974, New Foodgrain Policy was implemented. It announced that there would be different zones for the purchase and procurement of wheat. It meant that the trading of wheat was allowed only within a state. It could be exported out of the state only with the special permission of the government.

The Punjab peasants who were already agitated because of unremunerative price of wheat, became more furicat-ed when the single-state-food zone policy was enforced. Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (PKZU) took up the issue with the government and insisted on to do away with this policy. They wrote a letter to the then Prime-Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and explained, "A simple straight forward and most genuine demand of the farmers that the price of agricultural produce should be linked with the cost of production, has not so far

28. New Foodgrain Policy allowed the traders to purchase the wheat upto 2500 quintals on permit. But the condition was that they were to sell 50% of that total purchase to the government at a rate of Rs. 105 per quintal. The rest of it they could sell at a rate of Rs. 150 per quintal in the open market. See Sada Jug, May 19, 1974, pp.6-10.
been entertained. On the other hand, efforts were made to benefit the middlemen; traders and corrupt politicians by creating food zones and then lifting it when the grain was in the hands of big traders and black-marketers. The result was that grain was smuggled to deficit states with the blessings of senior officers and politicians in power.31

When the government did not pay any heed to such letters and blinked over the demands of the farmers, the union organised a big procession in Ludhiana. They gave a call for one day token strike on February 8, 1974 and ceased the supply of milk, fodder, vegetables and other agricultural products to the cities.32 The Union convened a Conference at Damdama Sahib (Bhatinda) on the Baisakhi day i.e., April 13, 1974 and decided to launch an agitation against the Single-State-Food Zone Policy of the government, popularly known as "Zone Toro Morcha".33

On April 21, 1974 Mohinder Singh Jawanda, violated the Food Zone Policy of the government by leading the batch of seven volunteers, carrying wheat on their heads, and crossed over the Himachal Pradesh interstate border, at village Ghanoli in Ropar district. Such batches were also sent to

31. This letter was written (dated nil, 1974) by Mohinder Singh Jowanda, the then President of PKZU. For reference see Appendix No. V.
33. Ibid.
Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan. The government arrested these volunteers and freed them after thirty to forty days imprisonment. Due to harvest season, the agitation could not last long for want of an adequate number of volunteers.  

During this agitation, two volunteers, Bhupinder Singh Isroo and Baba Gulzar Singh Sohia died in Patiala jail. But the government did not yield at all. Partap Singh Kadian, General Secretary of the Union writing about the outcome of the agitation stated that the government was shameless and unmoved that it did not even talk to the union representatives. It lowered the limit of food stocks which a farmer could keep with him to the tune of 100 quintals. Such a limit was challenged by the Union in Punjab and Haryana High Courts. The Court struck down the government order and admitted the plea of the petitioners. It is worth-noting that the Union adopted the judicial channel to pressurise the government.

Kisan Sabhas of CPI and CPM did not co-operate with PKZU on the issue of single state food zone. They were rather demanding that the New Food Policy should be scrapped and the

government agencies should make a direct purchase from the market. Showing their sharp reaction on Anti Single State Food-Zone agitation, Chajju Mal Vaid, General Secretary, Punjab Kisan Sabha commented, "It is an agitation of rural bourgeois and their mission is to exploit those who have, comparatively, less production of wheat. They want free hand for exploiting. If they were permitted, there is every possibility that the plight of the poor peasants of Punjab further becomes pitiable". However, Akali Dal supported the move of the union. PKZU continued their agitation alone. It proves the theory of Harry W. Ehrmann, where he comments, "A public interest group must often decide if it will enter into a working arrangement with other organisation for co-operative strategy or it will go alone on an issue". Though there was no immediate gain of this agitation yet the union felt morally encouraged, when the President of India V.V. Giri, mentioned in his address to the nation, that there should be only one zone for the whole of the nation, for the purchase of wheat.

During 'Internal Emergency' in 1975, the union kept a low profile. The General Elections of Lok Sabha in 1977,

41. The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, August 15, 1974.
changed the whole political scenario. The union supported Akali-Janata alliance in Punjab, on a condition that their demands would be accepted on a priority. When Janata Party took up the reigns of power into their hands and the peasant leader, Chaudhary Charan Singh became the Finance Minister along with Parkash Singh Badal as the Agricultural Minister, they took no time in scrapping the Single-State-Food-Zone policy. Commenting on the priority of agriculture, Chaudhary Charan Singh said, "As time passed, food will certainly play an increasingly important role in international politics. There is a distinct possibility of food-exporting countries using their exports as a political weapon against the importing countries. Therefore, if India has to live and make progress its leaders must assign top priority to agriculture".  

Bill Roko Morcha (1974-75)

This was an agitation against enhanced power rates. In 1974 due to the failure of Monsoons, there were power crisis and the supply of electricity was reduced to only 5 hours a day. The 'paddy growers' were in great despair. When the Punjab State Electricity Board also increased the flat rates of electricity, for 5 horse power motor, from rupees 8 to rupees 11 per horse power, the situation flared up and the peasants were up in arms.

The peasants of Laganh village in Dhariwal block, district Gurdaspur, organised themselves under the leadership of Sucha Singh Laganh, a local leader and decided to withhold the payment of electricity bills. This campaign later, became popular with the name of 'Bill Roko' agitation. The local volunteers of the union requested PKZU for coming to their rescue. The Union immediately sent its representatives to study the situation, and found that their demands were quite genuine.

The peasants of Jaura Chattra area stopped the payment of enhanced electricity bills. The Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB) reacted sharply and switched off the Jaura Chattra transformer. The peasants in return gheraoed the transformer and switched on the supply. Ultimately the Board took a harsh step and switched off the supply to the whole of the area from the 'Dhariwal Feeder'.

On September 25, 1974 the Union picked up the thread of the agitation into its hands and organised a protest march in district Gurdaspur and submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner. The Union further broadened its base by enlisting an other demand regarding the short supply of diesel. The Union President Capt. Harbhajan Singh Jandi and General Secretary Partap Singh Kadian went around various

places in Punjab and exhorted the farmers to participate in the Bill Roko Morcha. The Bill Roko agitation started on Oct 2, 1974.

For making their agitation a success the Union adopted a unique method. They collected the electricity bills of the tubewells of this area and deposited in the safe custody of the various Gurdwaras. Thus, the Union was able to withhold 35 thousands tubewell bills of electricity, out of one lakh forty thousand bills at that time.

On this defiance, the government swung into action and arrested 22 such defaulters. The Union threatened to intensify the agitation from November 17, 1974. The Union started sending the volunteers for courting arrests. The police arrested the volunteers initially, but after few days stopped doing so. Now the Union decided to gherao the office of the electricity in Dhariwal (Gurdaspur). The gherao had hardly lasted a week, when the government again started arresting the volunteers, particularly, those who were gheraoing the electricity office. The government also arrested the President of the Union Capt. Harbhajan Singh Jandi. Immediately P.S. Kadian took up the reigns of the 'Bill Roko'

46. Lok Lehar, Jalandhar October 3, 1974.
48. Ibid.
Morcha in his hands, and started operating the agitation from the religious place 'Gurudwara Burj Sahib'. There was lot of enthusiasm in the farmers. They were coming from different parts of Punjab to court arrests.

Keeping in view the determination of the farmers, the state government agreed to convene a meeting on January 5, 1975 at Chandigarh. The then state minister Santokh Singh Randhawa and deputy minister Balram Jhakhar participated on behalf of the chief minister Giani Zail Singh. Deputy Commissioner, Gurdaspur, Senior Superintendent of Police, Gurdaspur, Secretary and Superintending Engineer of Punjab State Electricity Board were from the government side. Partap Singh Kadian led a deputation of seven peasant leaders and participated from the Union's side. An agreement was signed on January 5, 1975. The government agreed to release all the arrested volunteers and other peasant leaders, unconditionally. Dhariwal Feeder was regenerated and all the electric connections which had been cut-off during the 'Bill Roko' agitation were restored. But each farmer whose electric connection was cut off had to pay Rs.50 as a 'goodwill' gesture.

49. As per the claim of the Union 600 farmers had courted arrests by December 26, 1974. See Ajit, Daily Newspaper in Punjabi, Jullundur, December 27, 1974.

50. The Jathas from Ludhiana, Sangrur and Amritsar also courted arrests thereby encouraging the farmers of Gurdaspur. Ibid.
The state government also agreed to convene a meeting of the Union and the Punjab State Electricity Board to sort out the problem of the electricity rates. Hardly had this agreement been realised when the government increased the revenue, water rates and some commercial taxes. The Union aptly launched another agitation which is popularly known as 'Lekha Pate Da Morcha'. (An agitation to take account of the representation of the farmers from the government).

The internal emergency in the country was promulgated on June 25, 1975. The peasants came under pressure and they agreed to pay the arrears in two instalments. The flat rates of electricity were further increased to Rs.19 per horse power. Keeping in view the Sixth Lok Sabha elections, the State Government became liberal and promised to reduce the power rates to Rs.13.50 per horse power. However, the Union was consistently emphasising for the meeting between the Board and the Union, as it had been promised under the terms of agreement.

The Congress government in Punjab wanted to win over the Union, but the Union tried to keep up the pressure on the state government. Akali party on the other hand, gave a support to the cause of the farmers and won the sympathy of the Union. In 1977, Congress suffered a crushing defeat in the Sixth Lok Sabha elections. Akali-Janata alliance

came into power. P.S. Badal was installed as the chief minister of Punjab. He gave an immediate relief to the farmers by reducing the rate for 5 horse power electric motor, from Rs.19 to Rs.12 per horse power. However, the Union never liked the alliance of Akali Dal with the Janata Party. In this connection, they submitted a memorandum to the Shiromini Akali Dal,

"The Akali Dal should forsake the Janata Party having in it a trader dominated faction of Jan Sangh and support the group led by Chaudhary Charan Singh. Failing this the discontentment amongst the villagers will prove very dangerous to the Akali Dal."  

By passing an other resolution, they supported Kisan leader Chaudhary Charan Singh and condemned the anti-agriculturists lobby in the Centre.

"In the name of discipline, a tussle is going on in the Janata Party to harass Chaudhary Charan Singh. Union feels that it is not a question of discipline but some people backed by the traders and big industrialists and trying to snub the poor-ruralite lobby which has been created by Chaudhary Charan Singh. It is a tussle of rural and anti-rural policies. Union thinks that Chaudhary Charan Singh is a Kisan, so, attempts on him or attempts on farmers. It is unanimously resolved that anti-rural lobby continue harassing Chaudhary Charan Singh and their those members of

54. Memorandum submitted by the Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union to Shiromani Akali Dal at its head office in Amritsar, under the leadership of Ajmer Singh Lakhwal, General Secretary of PKZU. July 23, 1979. For reference see Appendix No. IX.
Parliament who have won on the rural votes, should strongly back Chaudhary Charan Singh in this hour of crisis*.55

In a nutshell, it can be said that the union kept the administration on the toes by its various tactics during this agitation. It also played a remarkable role by involving itself both at the local and at the state level, for the welfare of the farmers of Punjab. Its reputation earned such a position that every political party wanted to take it into confidence.

**Tractor Morcha (1977-78)**

This was an agitation for the replacement of tractors. The issue came up when in Oct, 1977, some defective tractors were sold to the farmers of Gurdaspur and Amritsar districts by M/S J.C. Engineers, Amritsar. There was some manufacturing defect in their engines. The farmers wanted complete replacement of tractors whereas the company was ready only to overhaul the engines. The dispute started between the farmers and the dealer of the tractors, Massey Ferguson Tractor. The Punjab executive body of Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (PKZU) submitted a memorandum to the government.56 Some of the demands enlisted57 were -

55. Resolution passed unanimously by Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union on June 26, 1978 in its meeting held under the presidency of Partap Singh Kadian. See Appendix No. VIII.

56. This memorandum was submitted by Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union to the Punjab Government. A copy of it was also forwarded to the Central Government through Chief Minister, Punjab. It was submitted on December 5, 1977. For reference see Appendix No. VII.

57. Ibid.
- All tractors having manufacturing defects must be replaced with new ones.
- CBI should enquire into the bogus booking of the tractors and their sale in the black market.

The farmers met P.S. Badal, Chief Minister Punjab, at Muktsar along with some local union workers, on December 14, 1977. They asked him to seek justice for the farmers, failing which they would not be able to vote for him and his party, in the forthcoming by-election for the Faridkot Parliamentary seat. The Union tried to further pressurise the Chief Minister in a meeting on January 6, 1978, but he expressed his helplessness in this regard. Dharna programme continued up to January 31, 1978. When it was found ineffective, they started picketing the agency at Amritsar from February 1, 1978. The volunteers came from different districts and supported the cause of the farmers. When this too remained unresponsive, the Union threatened to intensify the agitation by picketing the various tractor agencies throughout Punjab. Ultimately, it was decided by the Union on February 20, 1978 that all the agencies of Massey Ferguson throughout Punjab should be picketed. Different dates for picketing these agencies were fixed.

59. The Union picketed the Massey Ferguson agency in Patiala on 21st February in Ludhiana on 23rd February in Jalandhar on 25th February and in Ferozepur on March 2, 1978.
The picketing of Jalandhar agency of Massey Ferguson Tractor is worth mentioning where the farmers came from various districts, in trucks and trollies and marched in the bazaars of Jalandhar, before picketing the agency. Incidentally, the then defence minister Babu Jagjivan Ram and the Chief Minister Punjab Parkash Singh Badal were in the town and they were addressing a big gathering when the long procession of the farmers passed thereby.\textsuperscript{60} Ludhiana unit also did the same type of picketing.

Comrade Darshan Singh Canadian showed his grave concern about the rising cost and poor quality of tractors. He pressed hard upon the need for developing the indigenous technology for it. Similarly other leaders like Gurbachan Singh Cheema and Master Gurbanta Singh raised their voice for the various tractor problems in the Punjab Legislative Assembly.\textsuperscript{61}

On March 2, 1978, the Union leaders met Surjeet Singh Barnala, Union Agricultural Minister and submitted a Memorandum. Surjeet Singh Barnala assured that he would try to convince the Industry Minister, Mr. George Fernandes. Seeing the passive response of the government, the Union tried to intensify the morcha by sending their representatives to

\textsuperscript{60} The Tribune, Chandigarh February 26, 1978.

other states and for seeking their support. Farmers' Association of Gujarat supported the Union struggle and sent resolution to that effect to the authorities.

In a special meeting on March 9, 1978, the Union decided to demonstrate in Delhi. They held a big demonstration in front of the Krishi Bhavan and submitted the Memoranda to the Industrial and the Agriculture Minister. George Fernandes assured the deputationist to look into the matter sympathetically.

On March 12, 1978 the senior vice-president of the Akali Dal released a statement to the press that Massey Ferguson Tractors has agreed to replace the defective tractors and the Union should now withdraw the agitation. The Union morcha administrator, Ajmer Singh Lakhowal gave an immediate press statement on March 13, 1978 that the Morcha would be withdrawn only when a written agreement would be signed between the government and the Union.

Consequently, an agreement was signed between the Union representatives and the dealers of Massey Ferguson in Punjab at the residence of the then Chief Minister P.S. Badal. The Company agreed to replace the engines of all the defective tractors by April 5, 1978. It was also agreed upon that a

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vigilance enquiry in the alleged fraudulent deal of the tractor dealers would be instituted and necessary changes in the tractor control order would be made to ensure replacement of defective tractors in future. The farmers felt jubilant. PKZU celebrated their victory by marching a victory procession in the bazaars of Amritsar.

The modus-operandi adopted by the Union in this agitation was multifold. Apart from Dhama, picketing and memorandum they tried to pressurise the ruling Akali Dal on the plea that they will help them in elections only if they help the peasants in sorting out their tractor problem. This technique testifies Jeffery M. Berry's theory that the groups may try to change governmental policy by influencing elections.

Similarly, when the peasants met the Agricultural Minister, Surjit Singh Barnala in Delhi and requested him to use his influence to impress upon the Industrial Minister George Fernandes, they tried to create lobby by their constituents. The special feature of this agitation was that it took place during the regime of Akali-Janata party. The lobbying technique of the peasant union got a positive response and the solution to the problem was sought soon.

65. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
Diesel Morcha (1978-79)

There was an acute shortage of diesel in Punjab in 1978, and the anti-social elements were bent upon making a good use of these crisis. The farmers made many appeals to the government to do something in this matter. But when there was no response from the government's side, the local unit of the Union of district Gurdaspur took up the initiative to check the black marketing, and submitted the Memorandum to the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC), Gurdaspur. The peasants were also agitated because of the unfair distribution of diesel. Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (PKZU) swung into action and caught red-handed one of the petrol pump owner doing the black of the diesel. Gurmukh Singh, President, Zimindara Federation of India along with Raghbir Singh, President, Punjab Zimindara Union appealed the government to take an early action to wash off the stigma of black marketing. Similarly, Sanji Kisan Sangrash Samiti comprising Kisan Sabhas CPI and CPM along with Kisan Dals of Akalis and the Kisan wings of Congress, persuaded the government for the fair distribution of diesel and to take action against the black marketers.

69. This Petrol Pump was situated on the Chandigarh-Ludhiana Road, Ludhiana and the name of the Filling Station was Raju Filling Station. Bhasik Taths, Op. Cit., p. 17.
The farmers blocked the road (Rasta Roko) leading from Samrala to Chandigarh. Incidentally, the then Governor of Haryana, Harcharan Singh Brar got struck in the road blocked. When he was told about the demands of the farmers, he realised the genuineness of the demands, but showed his helplessness.\textsuperscript{72}

During this 'Rasta Roko' campaign, Balbir Singh Rajewal, along with forty farmers was arrested. The farmers did not look back and started sending Jathas one after the other, for courting arrests. In February 1978, the Union President, Partap Singh Kadian and General Secretary, Ajmer Singh Lakhowal were also arrested in Samrala along with many other farmers. The farmers were annoyed with the Akali leaders. They did not permit them to enter into the villages. They made a strong protest against them and decided to oppose the Akali candidates in the forthcoming Gurudwara elections in 1978. After forty days long struggle, the government decided to release all the arrested farmers and their leaders unconditionally. The policy of distributing the diesel on cards was introduced but it did not fully satisfy the Union.\textsuperscript{73}

No doubt the Union fought several agitations, but during this agitation\textsuperscript{72} one thing became clear to peasants that the party in power, whosoever it may be, cannot come so openly

\textsuperscript{72.} The Tribune, January 31, 1978.
\textsuperscript{73.} See Ajit, Jalandhar February 8, 1979.
to support the cause of the farmers. The policies of the Akali-Janata Party were not suitable to their satisfaction. They started opposing this alliance too.  

In 1980, when Congress (I) recaptured the political power in the Centre, the Unions once again streamlined their difficulty of diesel through a Memorandum to Mrs. Indira Gandhi.  

Every year an acute shortage of agricultural inputs especially, diesel and fertilizers is created by the trading community in connivance with the bureaucracy. Farmers have to waste many men days to get them. However, they are always available in the black market. So it is demanded that the distribution system should be streamlined to ensure availability of their inputs to the farmers in time, and according to their needs. Strict measures adopted by the government in this regard shall be highly appreciated.

Inspite of this long struggle, no substantial solution came out. The government introduced the rationalisation of diesel which eased out the position temporarily.

Potato-Producers' Gherao (1979)

Potato producers problem popped up when the support price of potatoes was fixed up Rs.50 per quintal which was much less than the expectations of the farmers. The problem

75. Memorandum given by the Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (PKZU) deputation, led by Partap Singh Kadian. For reference consult Appendix No. VI.
augmented when the government agencies like NAFED suddenly stopped purchasing the potatoes, even at the fixed procurement price. The rates dropped so low that no body was ready to purchase the potatoes even at Rs.20 per quintal in the open market.76

The potato production during this year had increased from three and a half lakh tons to five lakh tons compared to last year. The situation grew so grave that even the cost of production was not recoverable.77 To show their resentment, the local units of PKZU in Batala (Gurdaspur); Khanna (Ludhiana); Kharar (Ropar) and Malrkrkotla (Sangrur) protested very strongly. They put dharnas before their respective Deputy Commissioner's offices. The farmers of Batala organised a big procession by carrying the loaded trollies of potatoes and unloaded them before the S.D.M.'s Court.78 The potatoes were distributed free of cost in the various mandis of Punjab. The farmers wanted to win over the sympathy of the public. They wanted to propagate about their pitiable plight and the economic injustice being done to them. They also preferred to plough the remaining standing crop of potatoes rather than harvesting.79 Some of them, who kept the potatoes in the cold stores had to withdraw

78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
because of the uncooperative attitude of the proprietors of the cold stores. 80

The various peasants organisations 81 condemned the indifferent attitude of the government and supported the cause of the potato-producers. The workers of PKZU gheraoed the social welfare minister Punjab, Satwant Kaur Sandhu in Batala and kept her standing for three hours in the scorching heat. They also blocked the road for more than three hours. 82 But no substantial solution came out of it. The farmers were so much frustrated that they decided to oppose the Akali-Janata alliance in the forthcoming elections. 83 In 1980, when Congress government came into power in the Centre, Partap Singh Kadian, President PKZU highlighted the problem of the potato producers through a memorandum to Mrs. Indira Gandhi. He said,

"Last year farmers were badly hit by the low and negligible prices of potatoes. This year also a very unremunerative price is being paid for the potatoes by the traders. Thus, farmers are again being looted now, in the market. To avoid this loot, a profitable support price should be fixed immediately and state trading of potatoes should be enforced to ensure them the minimum support price". 84

82. Akali Patrika, Jalandhar, April 15, 1979.
84. For reference see Appendix No. VI.
With the untiring endeavours of PKZU, the peasants were able to win the public sympathy temporarily, but no public or private agencies came forward to provide economic justice to the peasants.

Narma-Cotton Morcha (1979-80)

Bhatinda, Muktsar, Patti and Abohar, in Malwa region, are well-known for the cotton and Narma production in Punjab. As the cropping pattern of any particular area depends upon its agro-climatic conditions and the price structure, the cotton and Narma producers of this area have always been striving for the remunerative prices.85 Showing grave concern about the poor plight of the peasants, Comrade Shamsher Singh Josh told the house that the rate of Narma had slashed from Rs.250 to Rs.170. The cotton which costs the peasants Rs.240 per quintal was being purchased at the rate of Rs.145 per quintal. If something was not done to save the peasants, they would feel discouraged and would stop growing cotton and Narma in future.86

This proved true when the rate of growth of Narma and cotton fell down about 12 per cent & 6 per cent respectively, within a short span of four years from 1973 to 1977.87 The following table makes the picture more clear.


TABLE 4.2

Year-wise Growth Rate of Narma and Cotton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Narma</th>
<th>Cotton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the Communist Party of India, Chandigarh.

This constant fall of the growth rate was because of the unremunerative prices and the irregular purchase of cotton by the cotton corporation of India. It had been warned "If cotton corporation of India did not agree to purchase the cotton, the cotton producers will have to face lot of problems and there was every possibility of a sudden fall in the rates of cotton". 88

During Akali-Janata regime in Punjab, the rates of Narma and cotton had fallen enormously. Comrade Joginder Dyal seeing the attitude of the Akali government commented, "The Akalis who had been demanding Rs. 1000 per quintal for Narma, when they were out of power, are now not able to get

Rs.425 per quintal to the peasants, which is virtually quite less". 89 Balbir Singh Rajewal, Secretary, Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (PKZU), also condemned the government for the sudden fall in the rates of Narma and Cotton. 90

In November 1977 a Narma Utpadan Action Committee was formed. This committee was comprising the representatives of PKZU and the peasant leaders of various political parties. 91 The committee demanded that minimum support price of Narma should be Rs.550 per quintal. Cotton should be purchased at Rs.400 per quintal and the government agencies should start the purchase well in time and the cotton corporation should purchase the whole of cotton. They were also emphasizing for the need of installing more cotton mills and Punjab should have its own cotton corporation. 92

Narma Utpadan Action Committee created a congenial atmosphere for the emergence of Sanji Kisan Sangharsh Samiti. Earlier many endeavours had been undertaken in this regard, but no fruitful result had emerged. 93 In 1977, when the

92. Cotton Corporation of India used to purchase 9 per cent of the total crop but in 1977 they purchased only 2 per cent cotton. See Sada Jug, Chandigarh, December 7, 1977, p. 5.
Congress Party was rooted out both in Centre and State by the joint venture of the various political parties, it found in the fitness of situation to create a common front for safeguarding the interest of the party and the peasants. PKZU along with other Kisan wings of various political parties joined hands together to fight for the cause of cotton, Narma growers.

This Sanji Kisan Sangharsh Samiti protested and demonstrated at various places. They courted arrests in Bhatinda, Muktsar, Abohar and Barnala. They also blocked the traffic at various places. They decided not to take Narma and cotton to the mandis (grain markets) till their demands were conceded. Parkash Singh Badal, the then Chief Minister Punjab was also gheraoed in Faridkot. Ultimately, Surjit Singh Barnala, the then Union Agricultural Minister, assured the peasants for opening more cotton mills and promised remunerative prices for cotton and Narma. Thus, the cotton-Narma growers of this area were benefited because of the combined struggle of Sanji Kisan Sangharsh Samiti.

This Sangharsh Samiti fought at few more fronts collectively during Akali-Janata rule, but it could not last long for want of unity and uniformity of thoughts among them.

95. Ibid.
There are three types of Sugar Mills in Punjab, Private, Cooperative and Semi-Government. The cane growers, who supply the sugarcane to these mills have been facing mainly two types of problems. One relating to remunerative prices and the other regarding administrative snags at the part of the sugar mills. To solve the problems of the cane growers and the sugar mills, there is a provision of the office of the cane commissioner Punjab. The decision of the cane commissioner, in this regard, is always final and no appeal can be made against it.

One of the haunting problem of the sugarcane-growers was that the cane-arrears always used to stand against the sugar-mills. For instance in 1976 the position of the arrears of the various sugar mills were, as detailed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr.No.</th>
<th>Name of the Mills</th>
<th>Arrears (in lakhs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Batala</td>
<td>39.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Morinda</td>
<td>28.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Bhogpur</td>
<td>14.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Dhuri</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Phagwara</td>
<td>52.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Zeera</td>
<td>7.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Punjab Vidhan Sabha, Legislative Deptt., Chandigarh.
The mode of payment of the sugar mills have always been a cause of concern to the peasants. PKZU came forward to solve the problems of the peasants with the help of the local leaders, whenever and wherever the situation arose. In 1975, when the government fixed up the rate of sugarcane at Rs. 11.35 per quintal, the peasants got disappointed as they were demanding the implementation of Kidwai Formula. When the government did not pay any attention to their demand they decided to cease the supply of the sugarcane to all the sugar mills, particularly, in Jalandhar and Ropar districts. The struggle continued till the government agreed to increase the rate of sugarcane from Rs. 11.35 per quintal to Rs. 14.35 per quintal. This was quite heartening for the farmers specially for the sugarcane growers. This development also helped in strengthening the position of the Union.

Majha, where maximum sugarcane is grown on the western coast of Beas river, is also popularly known as Mand area. The sugarcane growers of this belt had been facing lot of problems. The Union met the Cane Commissioner, Punjab, on

99. A personal interview with Kirpal Singh (Sarpanch) Village Bhagwanpur, District Gurdaspur.

100. According to Kidwai Formula the rates of sugarcane and sugar were recommended into 16:1 ratio. According to this ratio the rates of sugarcane should have been Rs. 31.25 per quintal. See, Historical Facts of BKU, Op. Cit., pp. 15-16.


December 18, 1977 and apprised him of their difficulties. They also submitted a charter of demands. They also submitted a charter of demands.

(i) That the production of the COJ-64 variety of the sugarcane crop was less per hectare whereas its sugar yield was higher than other variety of sugarcane. The farmers growing COJ-64 variety should be given Rs.5 more per quintal.

(ii) That since the crop starts drying up after April 13, but gives a higher yield, the sugarcane supplied to the mill after this date should be paid Rs.2 more per quintal.

(iii) The farmers are delayed at the mills and their crops are not promptly unloaded causing them unnecessary inconvenience and harassment. It demanded that in case of delay at mills for more than 6 hours at a time, they should be paid Rs.10 per hour.

(iv) The farmers who sell the sugarcane crop to the mill should be given sugar at levy price.

(v) Due arrears of the sugarcane growers should be cleared with immediate effect.

On December 21, 1977, the Union took up the matter of the arrears of the farmers with the General Manager of the Batala Sugar Mill. The manager agreed and promised to clear the arrears within fortnight, but he did not keep up the

promise. In the Union's meeting at Ludhiana, on January 25, 1978 the delaying tactics at the part of the General Manager were condemned and was decided that an agitation should be launched against the authorities of Batala Sugar Mill. They gave the ultimatum to clear the arrears of the farmers immediately, but this too remained unheeded.

The sugarcane growers of the area assembled in the premises of the mill on February 2, 1978 and gave a very strong jolt to the management by holding a very big demonstration. They threatened the General Manager and did not permit him to move out till he agreed to clear the arrears in cash, there and then. These tactics of pressure worked out successfully and the mill authorities yielded to the pressure of the peasants. Here the theory advocated by Hardgrave proves true, that the peaceful demonstrations and resolutions do not carry any weight, until the organised groups turn violent.

104. A resolution to this effect was sent to the Mill Management, Batala on January 25, 1977. See Akali Patrika, Jalandhar, January 26, 1978.

105. The mill management had started making payment through the cooperative banks which the farmers never liked because they used to deduct instalments of loans due towards them out of the payment received from the mill. See Akali Patrika, Jalandhar, February 4, 1978.

For the other demands, the Union continued sending memoranda and resolutions to the Punjab Government and the Cane Commissioner. When the Akali Dal came to power in June, 1977, the Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal took the initiative and called the meeting of the Managing Committee of the sugar mills, Chairmen of the Cooperative Sugar Mills, the Cane Commissioner, and the Union representatives. The Akali-Janata MLAs from Gurdaspur and Amritsar districts also participated in the meeting. Parkash Singh Badal presided over the meeting. It was decided that the price of sugarcane should be raised by Rupee 1 per quintal. In case of COJ-64 variety, Rs.3 more should be paid and those farmers who supply after April 13, should be paid Rs.3.50 more, per quintal.107

In the same year, the Union also took up the matter of 'agreed price' and 'support price' of sugarcane with the government and pressurised them to do something in this regard.108 The government did not agree to fix up any agreed price. However, the Union was successful in getting a special bonus for the sugarcane growers. Batala Sugar Mill gave Rs.3 per quintal to their suppliers and all the other sugar mills of Punjab gave Rs.2 per quintal to their farmers.109

108. In fact, the Central Government fixes the support price. State Government only advises the 'agreed price', keeping in view the whole cost price and profit on it. Generally support price is taken as the 'agreed price' by the sugar mills, Government of Punjab, Cane Commissioner Office, Punjab, Chandigarh.
Most of the time the agitations of sugarcane grower started from District Gurdaspur. In 1980, when Panyar (Gurdaspur) mill was paying ₹2 less as compared to the Batala sugar mill and government was not in a mood to increase the rate of the sugarcane because of the great slump in the market, the struggle of the union became more difficult. The union had decided to send the batches of the volunteers to offer court arrests from throughout Punjab, but the response from the farmers side was not encouraging. As a result, the struggle remained confined only to Panyar sugar mill. Even the sugarcane growers of this area were not interested to prolong the struggle because of the glut of sugar in the market and the mill authorities were reluctant to make the purchase of the sugarcane. Keeping this fact in view the union members reached an agreement with the Mill Managements of Batala and Panyar Sugar Mills. The demands were partially met and the union decided to withdraw the agitation. The credit for the outcome of the agitation was taken by the local 'Gurdaspur Cane Growers Association'.

The reality remains that the rate of sugar had come down so sharply, that the mills were not ready to purchase the sugarcane. The peasants felt very much disheartened.


111. The local Congress and Akali Dal made an action committee along with the union leaders and reached an agreement.
They started blaming Akali-Janata party for this debate and consequently they started opposing the Akali-Janata alliance. In 1980, they played a vital role in uprooting the Akali-Janata party and in bringing the previous Congress party to power.\footnote{112}

In 1980, the government increased the rate of sugarcane from \textdollar{14.35} per quintal to \textdollar{17.35} per quintal.\footnote{113} This was too less as per the expectations of the farmers. This issue was taken up by 'Sanji Sangharsh Samiti'. Initially, they worked together and were successful in pressurising the government, but later on the differences crept in on the issue of the fixation of rates of sugarcane and as a result they started the struggle seprably.\footnote{114} PKZU demanded that at least \textdollar{30} per quintal should be the minimum rate for the procurement of sugarcane whereas Sanji Sanghrash Samiti was asking for \textdollar{25} per quintal.\footnote{115} When the government did not pay any attention to the demands of the farmers, the Union started the agitation from Batala on October 31, 1980 and ceased the supply of sugarcane to all the sugar mills of this area.\footnote{116}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{112}{Hardev Singh Boha, General Secretary, Bhartiya Kisan Union, 'Kisan' \textit{Op. Cit.}, pp. 5-6.}
\footnote{113}{\textit{Sada Jug}, Jalandhar, February 28, 1981.}
\footnote{115}{Sukhjinder Singh, ex-minister and president, Shiromani Akali Dal Wing, admitted in a gathering of farmers, near Nawanshahr that even if the Akalis come to power, they cannot afford to pay more than \textdollar{25} per quintal of sugarcane. See Facts of Bhartiya Kisan Union - a broucher of the Union, \textit{Op. Cit.}, p. 25.}
\footnote{116}{\textit{Sada Jug}, Jalandhar, February 28, 1981, p. 4.}
\end{footnotes}
Ultimately, the government yielded to the pressures of the farmers and agreed to pay Rs. 28 for COJ-64 quality of sugarcane and Rs. 26 for other qualities for Batala and Zira Sugar Mills. For other mills in Punjab Rs. 25 was fixed for COJ-64 and Rs. 23 for other qualities of sugarcane. This was one of the grand successes of Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (PKZU). In this agitation, the political parties remained far behind in watching the interest of the farmers. Table No. 4.4 depicts the clear analysis regarding the outcome of various agitations launched by various peasant pressure groups in Punjab.

The above table shows that there was an apparent tendency of the peasants to create a common front. Whenever they joined hands earnestly, they succeeded in making their way thorough. The strategy of 'influencing elections' had been more successful as compared to the other routine ones. Their immediate gains during Congress Party regime were discouraging as compared to that of the Akali Party. The outcome of the various agitations indicates the favourable attitude of the Akalis towards the peasants' pressure groups.

However, during 1979-80, the Akalis could not rise up to the expectations of the peasants, especially on the issues of remunerative prices of potatoes, Narma, cotton and sugarcane. The rates of these commodities had fallen so

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Name of Pressure Group</th>
<th>Name of Issue</th>
<th>Techniques adopted</th>
<th>Year/Period</th>
<th>Name of the Party in power and the name of the Chief Minister</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>PKZU</td>
<td>Anti Food Zone Policy</td>
<td>Big Processions, Courting Arrest Resolution, Influenced Elections</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Congress (Giani Zail Singh)</td>
<td>Failed in immediate objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>PKZU</td>
<td>Enhanced Electricity Rates</td>
<td>Gherao, Dharma Courting Arrest Bill Roko, Influencing Elections</td>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>Congress (Giani Zail Singh)</td>
<td>Failed in immediate objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>PKZU</td>
<td>Replacement of the Defective Tractors</td>
<td>Influencing the Elections, Dharma, Picketing and Lobbying</td>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>Akali-Janata (P.S. Badal)</td>
<td>Succeeded in objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>PKZU</td>
<td>Remunerative Prices for Potato</td>
<td>Gherao, Rasta Roko Resolutions</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Akali-Janata (P.S. Badal)</td>
<td>Failed in objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>SANJU SANGHARSH SAMITI*</td>
<td>Remunerative Price for Cotton and Narma</td>
<td>Gherao, Rasta Roko Ceasing supply to the Mandis</td>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>Akali-Janata (P.S. Badal)</td>
<td>Succeeded in objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Remunerative price for sugarcane</td>
<td>Ceasing of supply Gherao, Picketing and Processions</td>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>Akali Dal (P.S. Badal)</td>
<td>Succeeded in objectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sanji Sangarsh Samiti and Sanja Morcha was comprising PKZU and other Kisan wings of various political parties.
low that even their cost price was not recoverable. In 1980, the tables of political power were turned. Congress party regained power. For further consolidating their position the peasant unions formed a larger union which is popularly known, Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU).

III

Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU)

When Bhartiya Kisan Union came into existence at the national level, its first and foremost demand was that the Agricultural Price Commission should be scrapped. The Agricultural Price Commission (APC) was set up in January 1965 to provide scientific basis for price fixation. In May, 1984, Rao Birender Singh, Minister of Agriculture, claimed on the floor of the Lok Sabha, "APC works on scientific and economic methods". On the contrary, the peasant leaders of Bhartiya Kisan Union alleged "APC is not doing any useful purpose rather it is an instrument of exploitation". They further added and demanded "It has a little operative significance. It acts as an indicator of the maximum level upto which the prices may be allowed to rise. The APC has thus become rather a smoke-screen for the anti-farmer policies of the state. Therefore present model of the APC should be scrapped and a new commission may be created".

120. Ibid., pp. 32-33.
The farmers wanted that there should be an Agricultural Cost Commission, for determining the remunerative prices for all Agricultural products, on the basis of price index and cost index. BKU pressurised the government through various resolutions, seminars and memoranda. Consequently, the government agreed and changed the nomenclature from Agricultural Price Commission (APC) to Commission for Agricultural Cost and Price (CACP). In another resolution, Bhartiya Kisan Union demanded that the support prices of different crops should be fixed much before the sowing season. One of their prolonged demands have been that the Kisans should be permitted to process their agricultural produce. Many such demands were taken up by the Punjab Wing of BKU which are worth mentioning.

Bijli Morcha (1982-84)

The struggle started in December 1982, when Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB) revised the electricity tariff. The peasants have always been bitter about the attitude of the Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB). The notion of increasing

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121. Resolution passed at the state level conference of Indian Farmers Association at Hoshiarpur on January 20, 1982. For reference see Appendix No. X.

122. The flat rates of Tubewell were raised from Rs.13 to Rs.17 per horse power (h.p.) reconnection fee from Rs.10 to Rs.25, connection charges from Rs.500 to Rs.3000 and imposed certain other restrictions such as Rs.500 surcharge at per horse power, Rs.4 per horse power extra for using chaffcutter, thrasher, and cane crusher on tubewell motors and compulsion to use monoblock motors and plastic pipes for tubewells. The rates were enhanced by the Punjab State Electricity Board vide circular No. 75194/690/SSM-III dated December 6, 1982.
the rate of electricity has never been relished by the farmers. They feel that Punjab pools maximum in the national food bowl, but whenever the question of supplying electricity to the Punjab farmer's rises, it is supplied at much higher rate as compared to that of the other states. For instance in Andhra Pradesh the flat rates are Rs.50 per h.p. per annum. 123 Similarly, in Karnataka, according to one notification, "The Tariff applicable in respect of Irrigation Pump sets upto and inclusive of sanctioned load of 5 h.p. shall be at Rs.50 per h.p. per year irrespective of energy consumed". 124

This sudden hike in the rate of electricity had spread a wave of shock among the Punjab peasantry. To protest against this exorbitant increase, Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister, Union Ministers, opposition leaders and all other parliamentarians.

"We presented memoranda, held demonstrations and Dhamas etc. But the Punjab Government never thought to solve the problems by negotiations. Now, we hope that you will raise our demands in both the houses of parliament to press the government to accept our justified demands". 125


125. This letter was written by Ajmer Singh Lakhwal, General Secretary, Bhartiya Kisan Union Punjab and Balbir Singh Rajewal, Secretary, BKU, India Dated August 13, 1983. For more detailed information see Appendix No. XII.
For mobilising the large masses of peasants the Union organised rallies at the sub-divisions, divisions, districts and state level. The two worth mentioning rallies were Patiala rally on January 22, 1983 and Ludhiana rally on August 8, 1983. For building up the pressure on the government, BKU organised a big Dharma in front of Punjab Legislative Assembly. They also organised a large rally at the Boat Club in Delhi and courted arrests in front of the Parliament House. The government did not pay much attention to the rallies and dharnas. Again on January 2, 1984 about 11,000 farmers courted arrest in front of the Punjab State Electricity Board, Patiala.

The same day at Gurdwara Dukh Niwaran in Patiala, they decided unanimously, that they would launch an agitation and Ajmer Singh Lakhowal would be administering and organising the future line of action. After making full preparations, BKU decided to gherao the Punjab Governor B.D. Pande at his residence on March 12, 1984.

126. As per the claim of the BKU at about 7000 farmers participated in this Dharma. After this, 50 farmers used to sit on dharma daily, before the Punjab Assembly. Thus, dharma continued throughout the Budget Session. See Indian Express, Chandigarh March 8, 1983.

127. The Union claims that about 6700 farmers courted arrest at the Boat Club in Delhi. Times of India, Delhi August 9, 1983.

128. The Press Note issued by Bhartiya Kisan Union March 7, 1984. See Appendix No. XIII.

The demands enlisted were that the government should withdraw the enhanced electricity rates, service charges and collection on account of brick-lining of water channels. They also demanded higher procurement price of wheat, abolition of one per cent cess on agricultural products and chowkidara tax. Before finally swinging into action the Union called the press conference and declared openly that if their demands were not accepted by March 11, 1984, they will be left with no option but to gherao the Punjab Governor.  

On the said date, the peasants started assembling at the parade ground Sector 17, Chandigarh. At about 2 O'clock, they started marching towards the Punjab Raj Bhawan through various routes. The roads had been cardoned with barbed wires and the barricades. The Chandigarh administration had made the full arrangements for stopping the farmers from reaching the Raj Bhawan, but the peasants in such a large number overpowered the forces.

The farmers had come prepared and they settled down around the Raj Bhawan. They named it humourously 'Kisan Nagar'.

130. This press release issued by Ajmer Singh Lakhowal, General Secretary, BKU and Balbir Singh Rajewal, Secretary India, March 7, 1984. (Op. Cit.)


132. Ibid. The forces called were quite insufficient to handle the situation. Later on 14,000 strong force of riot police, BSF and CRPF personnels were put on 24 hour vigil around the Governor's residence.
The supply of ration was quite efficient from the neighbouring districts of Ropar and Patiala from where milk, vegetables, sweets and other eatables were made available in plenty. The organisers kept the morale of the peasants high with speeches at all the six picketing places. The drama party was there to entertain and to bring the general consciousness among the peasants for their rights.

They also made the huts for them. The city of Chandigarh started giving a rustic look. The civil life around the lake and Raj Bhawan, were thrown out of gear. The lush green lawns of private bungalows were grabbed by the farmers. They had open bath in the lake and made the adjoining area as an open air defecating place, which started stinking. Though the Chandigarh Administration had provided the sanitation facilities to the farmers, yet they chose to live in their own style. This rustic style of the farmers, in the city beautiful, also compelled the government to come to the negotiation table.

Prem Bhatia observed "The March on Chandigarh is symbolic of a new awakening and a new consciousness of status which cannot be diverted by sweet talks".

The new batches had started joining from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and

133. Golf Course Ground was the largest picketing site. The farmers also held the 'Akhand Path' in the Golf-Course Ground. The Tribune, Chandigarh March 16, 1984.

Haryana. Sharad Joshi, the leader of Shetkari Sangathan of Maharashtra and Mange Ram of Haryana gave an active support to the Union. Kisan Dal of Akali Dal, Kisan Sabhas of CPI and CPM also joined them voluntarily, but when the leaders of various political parties approached and offered their service, the Union declined it strongly and tried to keep up its basic non-political character.\(^{135}\)

They kept a complete secret of their activities and set up a unique example of cooperation, coordination and discipline.\(^{136}\) Such secret strategies baffled the government and it came under the pressure. It invited the Union for negotiation. Three long rounds of talks were held between the Punjab Government officers and the peasant leaders.

Ultimately, the deadlock was resolved and the government conceded to some of the demands immediately and for others it was decided to appoint a Committee.

Commenting on the performance of the peasants, R.K. Mishra, aptly remarked, "They come, they gherao, they win".\(^{137}\) S.K. Sud observed, "With considerably improved socio-economic lot, the middle rung peasantry is now caught in a race to, not only to increase its impulses, but also to lay hands at the highly technical means of production. Their

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grievances are that their income is only increasing, but not multiplying. Victorious and jubilant farmers lifted the gherao and assembled again in the Parade Ground, in Sector 17 and celebrated their victory. Speaking on the occasion, Ajmer Singh Lakhowal from Punjab; Sharad Joshi from Maharashtra and Mange Ram from Haryana declared that the whole credit goes to BKU for earning the concessions for the farmers.

Gurcharan Singh Randhawa of the CPI(M) reacted sharply to this claim and said, "The conceded demands were minor in nature and demands were conceded by the struggle of the whole peasantry rather than BKU alone." The uniqueness of the agitation was that it passed off peacefully and Governor B.D. Pande was virtually kept under house arrest for seven days.

The parties that commanded traditional following among the farmers like The Akali Dal, the CPI and the CPI(M), watched helplessly the show from the wings. While the Akali Dal offered its unconditional help, the CPI and CPI(M) chose to keep mum. Interestingly, the BKU leadership did not even care to thank the Akali Dal for extending support.

141. Ibid.
Taking into account all the factors, the government of Punjab, conceded to the following demands.142

(i) The peasants shall be entitled to run their toka, thresher and kulhari (cane crasher) using the motor installed for the tubewell, without any extra charge or surcharge except in the case of the use of load beyond the sanctioned limit and the use of load for the purpose other than mentioned above.

(ii) The use of monoblock, pump sets and plastic pipies was made compulsory for the new consumers only.

(iii) The re-connection charges were reduced to Rs.15 and it also ensured that the connections for tubewells shall be energised within a period of three months from the date of the submission of the test report and completion of other requisite formalities.

(iv) The surcharge relating to the installation of shunt capacitor shall be discontinued as soon as the amount collected equals the cost of shunt capacitor installed.

(v) Load splitting in respect of existing 5 h.p. tubewells shall be permitted in cases of bonafide division of the agricultural holdings and it was also decided that an agricultural consumer shall pay service connection charges, as may be determined by the group of experts.

However, for the interim period i.e. from March 18, 1984 till the Government of Punjab's decision on the report of the group of experts, the service connection charges will be from the rate of Rs. 3000 to Rs. 2000 and from Rs. 2000 to Rs. 1500 in respective areas. No other charges in respect of the mains or service lines shall be recovered. The recovery of electricity bills for tubewells was also deferred.

Morcha for the Release of Johl Committee Report

As a result of an agreement on March 18, 1984, the Punjab Government constituted a four member committee headed by S.S. Johal. It was to study the present level and structure of tariff applicable to agricultural tubewell consumers including the fuel escalation charges and service connection charges taking into account inter-alia the costs being incurred by the Punjab State Electricity Board on the one hand and on the other components of electricity costs taken into account in official agricultural support prices for wheat and paddy. With these terms of reference the committee was to recommend:

143. S.S. Johl was Vice-Chancellor, Punjabi University, Patiala. He is a known economist. Prof. M.M. Grewal was from the Department of Economics, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. N.K. Dey was the Advisor to Damodar Valley Corporation, Calcutta. Dr. R. Rajagopalan was Additional Secretary to the Central Authority of Electricity, Government of India. See, Johl Committee Report, 1984.

(i) Variation in the present level and structure of agricultural tariff, if any.

(ii) Principles for determination of agricultural tariff in the light of relevant economic considerations both as regards the Punjab State Electricity Board and the agriculturists and

(iii) Level of service connection charges to be recovered from agriculturists.

The Committee worked day in and day out and gave a report within the stipulated period and submitted its report on May 31, 1984. The Union asked for the publication of the Johl Committee report but the government somehow was reluctant to do so. The Union threatened to launch an agitation against the refusal of the government for not publishing the report. The government kept silent. Ultimately, the Union decided to disrupt the transportation of wheat from Punjab to other states, on June 10, 1984. They planned to block the roads and railway tracks. This plan of the Union could not be materialised because of 'Blue Star' operation on June 3, 1984. The struggle of the Union for the release of Johl Committee report was postponed for sometime..

The struggle was revived again on July 4, 1984 when the Union volunteers staged demonstrations in their respective tehsil headquarters and courted arrests in a large number.145

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145. As per the claim of the Union 54,300 farmers courted arrest who were let off by the police after few hours. Historical Facts, BKU Op. Cit., p. 36.
Bhupinder Singh Maan, Ajmer Singh Lakhowal, Balbir Singh Rajewal along with other top leaders were arrested from their homes and were kept in Ludhiana jail. After sometime, the Deputy Commissioner, Ludhiana approached them for some sort of settlement. The leaders put a pre-condition for the release of Johl Committee report. The government agreed and released the leaders. The government invited them to participate in the meeting at Chandigarh on July 9, 1984. The Union sent its representatives, Ajmer Singh Lakhowal (General Secretary) and Balbir Singh Rajewal (Secretary) to put forward their viewpoints. When BKU delegates protested for the 'release of the Johl Committee report', the meeting was adjourned. Somehow, it was given to understand by the government that a copy of the Johl Committee report can be provided only on a condition that neither of the party will make it public, unless both the parties reach some permanent settlement. The Union delegation accepted this also. But the copy of the Committee Report was neither issued to the Union nor was it published.

Instead of releasing the Johl Committee Report, the government started collecting the due bills from the farmers. They also started disconnecting the connections of electricity.

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146. These leaders were arrested under Section 107/151 Cr.P.C. for the maintenance of law and order.
147. This meeting was convened by P.H. Vaishnav (the then Financial Commissioner (Development) Punjab, Chandigarh on July 9, 1984. See, The Tribune July 10, 1984.
The farmers were taken aback. They started courting arrests at the district levels throughout Punjab. On July 20, 1984 about 27,000 peasants courted arrest. The peasant organisations of the other states also came forward and supported their counterparts in Punjab. Mange Ram Malik from Haryana, Sharad Joshi and Vijay Jawanda from Maharashtra, Chiman Bhai Patel and Shri Babu Bhai Patel from Gujarat and Rama Krishna Gandhi from Uttar Pradesh were some of the prominent peasant leaders who gave whole hearted support and courted arrests in Chandigarh. Even the four groups of women from villages Sanipur Khojemajra near Sirhind in district Patiala courted arrests during this agitation.

When the government was not budging an inch from its stand, the Union gave a call for a 'rally' in Chandigarh on September 10, 1984. The farmers were asked to bring their ration along with them. The government got panic. They decided to stop the farmers from coming to Chandigarh and banned the rally. They arrested Balbir Singh Rajewal and Gurbachan Singh Bhomian from the Panchayat Bhawan, Chandigarh and Bhupinder Singh Man from Batala. Ajmer Singh Lakhowal who went underground and continued the farmers for march to Chandigarh.

149. Press Note released by Balbir Singh Rajewal, Secretary (India), Bhartiya Kisan Union. December 23, 1984. For reference see Appendix No. XV.
On September 9, 1984 all buses coming to Chandigarh were terminated. The police raided almost all hotels, rest houses and inns and arrested number of farmers. Sharad Joshi from Maharashtra, Mange Ram from Haryana and Ajaib Singh Khara from Punjab managed to reach Chandigarh in disguise. The Parade Ground Sector 17 of Chandigarh was completely cordoned. Even then about 12,000 farmers managed to reach the State-Capital. Keeping in view the tense situation and apprehension of violence, Ajmer Singh Lakhowal called the press people and announced withdrawal of the call.

However, the struggle continued. Roldu Singh, Vice-President, BKU (India) courted arrest along with 95 peasants in Chandigarh on February 12, 1985. When in September, 1985, the popular government was installed in Punjab and Surjit Singh Bamala headed the Akali government, the Union again took up the issue. On January 11, 1986, the Finance Minister, Balwant Singh convened a meeting of Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB) and Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU). In this meeting the government accepted the long pending demand of the Union, regarding the release of Johl Committee Report.

151. Press Note, released by Balbir Singh Rajewal, Secretary, BKU (India) February 12, 1985. See Appendix No. XVI.


It was a general impression to the peasantry that the government does not pay remunerative price for the wheat. In 1983-84 the procurement price of wheat was Rs. 151 per quintal whereas the farmers were demanding Rs. 200 per quintal. In 1984-85, the government increased the procurement price of wheat by only one rupee i.e. from Rs. 151 to Rs. 152. The farmers felt offended and could not bear this cruel joke. They launched an agitation for the higher procurement price of wheat.

The Union decided to cease the grain markets by blocking the supply of wheat from May 1 to May 7, 1984. This campaign not to sell the wheat in the market at the prevailing price, is popularly known as 'Kanak Bandh'. This agitation was so vigorous that almost all the Kisan wings irrespective of their political affiliations, joined hands together.

A team of press, toured the major grain-markets of Ropar, Ludhiana and Patiala including Asia's biggest Mandi at Khanna and found that not a grain of wheat had been received in these markets. This Kanak Bandh showed the resentment among the peasants and the hold of BKU on the peasants. This

153. Government of Punjab, Food & Supply Department, Chandigarh. Arrival and procurement price of wheat from 1972-73 to 1984-85. Also see Appendix No. XVIII.
154. Ibid.
was the second time in three months that the BKU had demonstrated its hold over the peasantry of Punjab.

Though the bandh was complete, yet the government did not alter its stern stand. Keeping in view the poor economic plight of the peasants, the Union decided after 7th May that the farmers may be allowed to sell their produce in the market at the given rate. They said, that selling wheat at Rs.152 was their mere economic compulsion and their intention is not to block the procurement process of the government.156

Marry Anne Weaver, a special correspondent of the Sunday Times, London, writes that not a grain of wheat had been moved from the field to the market or the public distribution points in the seven days and the 70 per cent farmers of Punjab stood together against buyers from the food corporation of India, which were reduced to playing cards in the deserted auction houses.157 The Union warned the government that it must pay the losses of the peasants, incurred by selling their produce at the low rate.

Commenting on such situation, Sharad Joshi worted "BKU has given the government a breather upto June 10, 1984 to reconsider its position, after which it will launch an agitation to stop all movements of wheat within and out of Punjab. It

156. Ibid.
THE HARDER WE TOIL THE MORE WE GET INDEBTED

(LOANS OVERDUES: 1966-82)

Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab

FIG. 4.1
has also decided that the wheat production will be brought down by 25 per cent in the coming year". This programme of the union could not be through because of Blue Star Operation in Punjab.

According to a statistical analysis made by Bhartiya Kisan Union, in 1970 the peasants were under debt to tune of 17.61 lakh. This debt mounted to 39.91 crores in 1975 and 50.33 crores in 1980. By the end o: 1982 it touched 76.69 crores. Thus the debts of the farmers were not only increasing but were multiplying, year after year. Due to unremunerative prices of the agricultural products and the high rates of agricultural inputs, the repaying capacity of the poor peasant was decreasing day by day. This heavy debt was not only discouraging, but bone-breaking. This becomes absolutely clear from Figure 4.1.

Therefore, the Union decided not to repay any type of loans and appealed to the government to exempt all loans due towards the farmers. In April, 1984, BKU refused to pay back the loans advanced by the cooperative banks and other commercial banks. This movement is known as the 'Karja Bandh'. They declared these loans as ill-legal and asked the government to prepare a 'balance sheet'. The Union itself prepared a balance sheet for 1983-84 and showed the losses of Rs. 1732.52

crores to the farmers, because of the policies of underpaying. So the Union decided not to repay the loans. 159

They stopped the entry of all those officials, into the villages, who came for the purpose of recovery of loans. They also banned the entry of all the politicians, particularly, the Congress leaders. Bhartiya Kisan Union hung notice boards at village entrance and crossings. These boards carried the warning "without proper accounting recovery of loans is illegal. Entry of recovery staff in the village is strictly prohibited without the permission of BKU". 160

This banning the entry of the recovery staff and the political leaders without answering some of the questions of the Union workers is known as 'Pind Bandh'. The Union had made temporary jails, Tooriwala Kotha (A shabby room where animals' fodder is kept). All the recovery staff was afraid of this and they did not dare entering the villages. Thus 90 per cent of the loans could not be recovered by the cooperative banks and other commercial banks.

Critically evaluating 'Karja Bandh' agitation, the editor of the Tribune commented, "The decision not to pay back crop and other loans spells trouble". The government agencies may retaliate by refusing to advance fresh loans

to the defaulters. The condition of the small farmers who are defaulters will deteriorate more than the middle and the rich farmers who have other sources than crop loans".161

Gurcharan Singh Randhawa observed "In case the banks refused to advance loans to defaulters they will be forced to get loans from the commission agents at a very high rate of interest which will further deteriorate the condition of small and middle peasants.162 The union leaders also realised this drawback of their agitation but they were of the opinion that this was the only method to pressurise the government for the overall demand of the farmers. "Farmers all over Punjab as also in a number of other states, declared unilateral moratorium on the repayment of loans".163

SUTLEJ YAMUNA LINK - MORCHA (1985-86)

Akali Dal initially was against the very construction of Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal.164 After Rajiv-Longowal accord on July, 1985, the Akalis changed their attitude toward this issue and agreed to construct the canal. But BKU had a

162. Lok Lehar (Punjabi) April 8, 1984, p. 5.
164. Akalis had made it as one of their main demands in their Dharam Yudh but Communists did not support the Akalis on this issue, they rather opposed them. See Rajji Review Report, Communist Party of India, February 27-28, 1986, p. 11.
divergence of opinion regarding the alignment of the Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal right from the beginning. They were of the view that the present alignment would cause devastation of lakhs of acres of fertile land and the farmers would be sufferers, particularly that of Morinda in Ropar district.

In September 1985, the Akali Dal came into power in Punjab and Surjit Singh Bamala became the Chief Minister. In their election campaigns, the Akali Dal had been promising that they would help in the alteration of the alignment of the canal in question. When they came to power they did not bother about their promise. They, rather decided to go ahead with the same alignment of the canal.

Keeping in view the attitude of the Akalis, B.K.U. started a Morcha, to get the alignment of the canal changed. It also made clear that its agitation was not directed against the digging of the canal, but it wanted its alignment to be along the foothills of Shivaliks so as to avoid the colossal loss to a large number of farmers.165

The Union's viewpoint was that the proper alignment of S.Y.L. Canal, along the Shivalik foothills would not only save Punjab from the seasonal floods but would also irrigate the barren Kandi areas of Punjab.166 When the government


166. For this purpose the Union also got the support of other militant groups like AISSF and UAD of Baba Joginder Singh. CPI and CPM also gave a support to this cause. Kehar Singh, Op. Cit., p. 120. Also see The Tribune, October 18, 1985.
gave deaf-ears to all these arguments, the agitation was launched from village Patheri Jattan in Ropar district on October 17, 1985. The farmers put a dharna at the site and pressurised the government for the re-alignment of the canal.\textsuperscript{167}

K.T. Satarwala, the then Governor Punjab, finding some logic in the demands of the Union, deputed Dr. H.L. Uppal to study the complexity of re-alignment of the SYL canal. In his recommendation, he suggested the re-alignment of the canal along the foothills of the Shivalik in the Ropar district, but the re-alignment would cost Rs. 30 crores. This was not acceptable to the government. The Union felt disheartened on the 'Uppal Committee Report' and decided to continue their agitation. In a rally on November 3, 1985 they decided to start a state level agitation.\textsuperscript{168}

The Chief Minister, Surjit Singh Bamala, invited the Union for settling the dispute on November 11, 1985, but he could not pacify the union members for giving up the demand. The union also organised a big rally in Chandigarh in this regard and warned the government that the farmers would start the 'Jail Sharar' agitation. Keeping in view the stern attitude of the union, an other committee was formed by the

\textsuperscript{167} Dr. H.L. Uppal, Director Irrigation and Power Research Institute "Water Logging in Punjab - Causes and Concern", \textit{The Tribune} February 7, 1960, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{The Tribune} Chandigarh November 5, 1985.
Chief Minister. The committee consisted of two members R.J. Gill and Gurcharan Singh. After carefully looking into the matter, the committee gave a report on January 3, 1986, and recommended for the retention of the present alignment. While commenting on the Uppal Committee report it said "Though, technically it is feasible to construct SYL canal through the foothills of Shivalik mountains in Ropar district yet it would cost more than three times and it would take many years to mature." 169

The union was not in a mood to relent its pressure on the government. They decided to ban the entry of Akali MLAs in the villages. They successfully stopped the digging work of the SYL canal at Majal on March 30, 1986. About 1200 workers of the union were also arrested. 170 Ultimately, the government found it in the fitness of the situation to announce certain major concessions to the farmers, affected by this present alignment of SYL canal. They agreed to enhance the compensation from ₹85,000 to ₹1,00,000 per acre for irrigated land and ₹13,000 to ₹20,000 per acre for dry land. It was also agreed that employment will be offered to one person from each affected family. Full compensation for houses, trees and underground pipelines was promised. Electricity to the affected farmers on a priority basis,

compensation in one instalment, allotment of residential plots to the affected families at Morinda and Mohali were also agreed upon.\textsuperscript{171}

This offer of the government allured some of the local peasant leaders of the affected area. As a result the union had to withdraw this agitation. However, as a matter of principle, the union could never compromise on this account and the Sutlej Yamuna Link issue is still alive.\textsuperscript{172}

\textbf{Agitation against Paddy Procurement Policy of FCI (1985-86)}

In 1985 Food Corporation of India (FCI) decided not to purchase the paddy which had more than 18 per cent of moisture in it. F.C.I. used to purchase more than 60 per cent of paddy from Punjab. This policy of FCI gave a sudden shock to the peasants of Punjab. Even the Punjab Government supported the cause of the farmers. The policy of FCI was condemned in the Punjab Legislative Assembly by the Akali MLAs. They alleged that there was conspiracy on the part of the Central Government to punish the peasants for having supported the Akali Dal in elections. Prem Bhatia observed and pointed out "Centre is not being fair to the Punjab farmers."\textsuperscript{173}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{172} Ajmer Singh Lakhowal, a personal interview at his village Lakhowal, Ludhiana July 7, 1994.
\textsuperscript{173} Prem Bhatia, 'Unfair to Paddy Growers', \textit{The Tribune}, Chandigarh October 18, 1985.
\end{flushleft}
Bhupinder Singh Mann and Ajmer Singh Lakhowal led a big rally of the peasants and demonstrated in front of the FCI office on October 24, 1985. It also threatened against launching an agitation against the government if their demand was not conceded. The union also presented the memorandum to the authorities.

It was a very crucial period for the farmers. For fifteen days the farmers could not sell their produce (Paddy). Compelled by the financial restraints, the farmers were forced to sell the paddy even at the lower rate than the procurement price to the private agencies. BKU decided to gherao the grain markets. They also blocked roads on November 12, 1985. Ultimately, the state government agreed to increase the allotted quota of mandis. It is clear from the following table.

**TABLE 4.5**

*Comparative Purchase of Paddy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Support price</th>
<th>Punjab Food Supplies</th>
<th>F.C.I.</th>
<th>M.Fed</th>
<th>PUNSUP</th>
<th>Millers</th>
<th>G. Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-85</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>368034</td>
<td>1892472</td>
<td>87073</td>
<td>207627</td>
<td>4431603</td>
<td>6986809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-86</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>804788</td>
<td>1853941</td>
<td>296438</td>
<td>483213</td>
<td>3667126</td>
<td>7105506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-87</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>387176</td>
<td>1547825</td>
<td>208056</td>
<td>33288</td>
<td>5089159</td>
<td>7565102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tentative Figures.

*Source:* Food and Supplies Department, Govt. of Punjab, Chandigarh.
It is evident from the above table that when FCI refused to purchase the paddy in Punjab, the State agencies like Food Supplies of Punjab, Markfed and PUNSUP had to increase their purchase of paddy to satisfy the farmers. The sudden fall of purchase by FCI, in 1985-86, on the pretext of more moisture, threw the whole load on the state procurement agencies. Even the private millers were also hesitant to make the purchase.

In fact, the growth of paddy crop in Punjab, entirely depends upon the intensity of Monsoons. In 1986, the lack of Monsoons made it extremely difficult for the peasants to protect the paddy. The peasants had to bank upon the tubewells run by electricity and diesel, which were already short in supply. The peasants had to spend extra energy and money to protect paddy. They even had to sacrifice other crops like maize and sugarcane because they could not pay due attention to these crops. Their only hope was that they would be fairly compensated by the government. All their hopes were shattered when the government fixed up Rs.146 per quintal as the procurement price of paddy. For fine variety of paddy they fixed up Rs.150 as against Rs.142 in 1985-86.\textsuperscript{174}

The procurement agencies were reluctant to purchase the paddy even at the given rate.\textsuperscript{175} The peasants were

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{174} Government of Punjab, Food and Supply Department, Chandigarh. 'Arrival/Support Price/Purchase of Paddy' 1972-73 to 1988-89. Also see procurement price of various crops. Appendix No. XVIII.
  \item \textsuperscript{175} In 1986-87, all the Food Procuring Agencies decreased the purchase of paddy and the peasants had to sell it to the private mills at a throw away prices. See Table No. 4.5.
\end{itemize}
in great predicament. The union took up the issue with the government and threatened to launch an agitation. They gheraoed the office of the Food Corporation of India. They blocked the roads and railway tracks. At first the peasants decided not to sell paddy at the given rate but keeping in view their economic restraints, they started selling it in the open market, even at the lower rate. Observing this plight of the peasants, Balbir Singh Rajewal Secretary, BKU, sarcastically remarked 'Rut Chonna Lutan Di Aai'.

Virtually, the peasants are always in a hurry to sell the paddy as they have a general notion that if paddy dries up, it will weigh less and they would not be able to get the fair return. On the other hand the purchasers always make a good use of their apprehension and bargain the purchase of paddy at a low price. However, the Union kept up the pressure on the government and consequently the state government agreed to pay Rs.17 per quintal, in addition to the procurement price fixed by the government.

Apart from these major agitations the union also took up certain issues which were of paramount importance, for the peasants. For instance, they raised their voice

177. For reference see Appendix No. XVIII.
against the malpractices in the mandis by Aarthis (brokers) and the employees of the Marketing Committees. In 1986, at 'Bhunsaheri' grain market in Patiala district, the union workers caught red handed thirteen persons who were doing bungling in weighing wheat. According to an estimate, about 169 quintals of wheat was being weighed more as compared to the actual one. The union workers not only brought such people to the books but were also compelled to compensate to those who were their victims.

Such actions of the union had created an atmosphere where every person was afraid of doing injustice to the peasants. They highlighted some cases of corruption in various departments like irrigation, electricity and cooperative societies. They took up the issue of 'Pakke Khaals' (Bricklining of the water channels for irrigating the fields) and succeeded in getting the exemption from the recovery of loans, worth Rs.300 crores.

The union also launched a campaign against the malpractice of the co-operative societies. They submitted many memoranda to the government in this regard and insisted on looking into the problem, seriously. They alleged that the co-operative societies which have been formed to

serve a useful purpose, have become a liability to the peasants. Balbir Singh Rajewal commented in one of his writings, "Main function of the village cooperative societies is to give credit to the farmers partly in cash and partly in the shape of fertilizers and seeds, but the farmers are placed in great predicament in obtaining such credits." 180 When the union member raised their voice for the revision of such cooperative societies, the Governor of Punjab constituted a committee to study the working of Punjab co-operative societies Act 1961, with a view to suitably revise it. The two members of the union Balbir Singh Rajewal and Mohinder Singh Jawanda, were also included in the committee. 181 The important agitations launched by Bhartiya Kisan Union have been analysed below on the basis of issues involved, techniques and strategies adopted, political party in power and the outcome of the struggles. See Table No. 4.6.

Bhartiya Kisan Union comparatively was a larger peasant pressure group of Punjab. It overshadowed and eclipsed all other peasant organisations. The issues involved were taken up in a more tactful manner which


<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Name of Pressure Group</th>
<th>Name of Issue</th>
<th>Techniques adopted</th>
<th>Year/Period</th>
<th>Party in Power and the name of the Chief Minister</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>BKU</td>
<td>Enhanced rates of Electricity</td>
<td>Press release, Rallies, Demonstrations, Memorandum and Gherao</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Governor Rule</td>
<td>Succeeded in objective partly (Immediate Gains)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>BKU</td>
<td>Johl Committee Report</td>
<td>Courting arrests, Demonstrations and Rasta Roko, Influencing Election</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Governor Rule</td>
<td>Not accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>BKU</td>
<td>SYL-Canal</td>
<td>Dhama, Demonstrations and Courting arrests</td>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>Akali Dal (Surjit Singh Bamala)</td>
<td>Unsuccessful in objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>BKU</td>
<td>Paddy Price</td>
<td>Cheroo, Agitation, Demonstrations and Rasta Roko</td>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>Akali Dal (Surjit Singh Bamala)</td>
<td>Succeeded in objective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Captivating Recovery Officials in a shabby village room meant for storing animal fodder.
boosted up their morale particularly, after the gherao of Governor of Punjab in March, 1984. It earned such a reputation that it started being recognised as one of the biggest pressure groups of Punjab. The unique factor of this union was that it launched agitations during the period when no popular government was in power in Punjab. Though the Union was successful in exhibiting its standing and strength yet it could not achieve any such success which could adorn a special feather in its cap. Their stiff strategies earned them immediate gain in shape of minor concessions, but their long term gains were hardly countable.

Thus, the agitations launched by pressure groups in agricultural sector brought overall awakening among the Punjab peasantry. Their day-to-day activities created such an environment which compelled the peasants to break their age-old tradition of 'silent sufferings'. Their apolitical character made them conspicuous during the stipulated period. They became the mouth piece of the peasants and highlighted their problems, whenever the situation demanded.