

THE LEFT-WING IN INDIA
(1919—47)

By
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*Dedicated to the respectful memory of my
grand-father, late Gulajar Sinha, a wise,
sturdy and valiant peasant who taught me
many things.*

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|---------|
| <i>Preface</i> | I-XIV |
| 1. Chapter One : Introduction. Nineteenth Century India—Unrest among peasants and workers—Philanthropy and organisations for Labour—International Socialism and India—Conclusion. | 1—29 |
| 2. Chapter Two : Early Beginnings, 1918-February, 1922. The new situation after War—Non-Cooperation, the role of Mahatma Gandhi, and the origin of the Left-wing—The impact of the Russian Revolution—Influence of the British Labour Movement—Birth of the All-India Trade Union Congress—The Communist International, Communist pioneers and formation of the Communist groups—Conclusion. .. | 30-103 |
| 3. Chapter Three : Growth of Communism and Militant Trade Unionism (March, 1922—March, 1929). Communists and the Trade Unions—Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy Case (1924)—Increase of Communist activity in the Trade Unions—The Communist political line—Roy's project of a People's Party—Attempts at formation of a legal Communist Party—Workers' and Peasants' Parties—The Projected Labour Party—The Sixth Congress of C. I. and the turn in Communist activity—Conclusion. | 109-232 |

CONTENTS—Contd.

4. *Chapter Four* : **Communism (March 1929-March 1934).**

The Meerut Trial—Attempts to salvage the C.P.I.—New Platform of Action—The Communists' attitude to the National Congress and Civil Disobedience—Communists and Left Congressmen—Splits in the A.I.T.U.C.—Birth of the Roy Group and the relation with the Communists—Navendu Datta Mazumdar and his Labour Party—Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutt—Concern of the C.I. at the new turn in tactics—Conclusion. .. 233-277

5. *Chapter Five* : **Transition to Congress Socialism (1927-1933).**

The Left nationalists inside the Congress—Origin of Youth movements—Peasant movement—Conclusion. 278-303

6. *Chapter Six* : **Congress Socialism (1934-1939).**

Birth of the Congress Socialist Party—Idea germinates in the Nasik Prison—First All-India gathering of the Congress Socialists at Patna—First Conference of the All-India C.S.P., Bombay—Controversy with the Congress Right on the formation of the C.S.P.—Decisions of the Bombay Conference—Ideology of the C.S.P.—Policies and tactics of the C.S.P.—Answer of the Congress Socialists to the charges by the Left and the Right—Criticism of Dr. Das' Ancient Scientific Socialism—Critique of Gandhism—C.S.P. and Marxism—Conclusion. .. 304-384

CONTENTS—Contd.

| | | |
|-----|---|-------------------------------|
| 7. | Chapter Seven : The United Front (1935-39) Formation of the All-India Kisan Congress—Towards United Trade Unionism—Roy and the Roy Group—The Communists and the People's Front—The United Front at work—The break-up of Left Unity—Birth of the Forward Bloc and after—Formation of splinter Left Groups, Bolshevik Party of India, Revolutionary Socialist Party of India, Revolutionary Communist Party of India, the League of Radical Congressmen—Conclusion. | 385-484 |
| 8. | Chapter Eight : The Left during the World War Two (1939-45). The National Congress and the War (Sept. '39—June '41)—The Left and the War (1939-'41), the Forward Bloc, the Communists, the Congress Socialists, the Roy Group—The Left and the War (June '41-'45),—August Movement—New Parties of the Left, the Radical Democratic People's Party, Bolshevik Party of India, R.S.P.I., Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India—Conclusion. | 484-530 |
| 9. | Chapter Nine : The Left-Wing on the eve of Independence (June 1945-August 1947). The Left-Groups and Transfer of power, the R.D.P., the Congress Socialists, the C.P.I., and smaller left-groups—Communalism, Pakistan and the Left—The state of the Left-opposition, the C.S.P., the C.P.I., the R.D.P., the Forward Bloc—Conclusion. | 531-581 |
| 10. | Chapter Ten : Conclusion <i>Bibliography</i> <i>Index</i> | 582-593 594-617 618-623 |

ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|----------------------------|----------|---|
| A.I.C.C. | : | All-India Congress Committee |
| A.I.K.C. | : | All-India Kisan Congress |
| A.I.K.S. | : | All-India Kisan Sabha |
| A.I.T.U.C. | : | All-India Trade Union Congress |
| A.I.T.U.F. | : | All-India Trades Union Federation |
| A.I. W. & P. P. | : | All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party |
| A.I. C.S.P. | : | All-India Congress Socialist Party |
| A.I.R.F. | : | All-India Railwaymen's Federation |
| B.T.U.C. | : | British Trade Union Congress |
| B.L.P.I. | : | The Bolshevik Leninist Party of India |
| C.A. | : | Constituent Assembly |
| C.C. | : | Central Committee |
| C.I. | : | Communist International |
| C.P.G.B. | : | Communist Party of Great Britain |
| C.P.I. | : | Communist Party of India |
| C.P. | : | Communist Party |
| C.P. | : | Central Provinces |
| C.S.P. | : | Congress Socialist Party |
| E.C.C.I. | : | Executive Committee of the Communist International |
| G.K.U. | : | Girni Kamgar Union |
| H.S.R.A. | : | Hindusthan Socialist Republican Army |
| I.L.O. | : | International Labour Organisation |

ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|------------|---|--|
| I.F.T.U. | : | International Federation of Trade Unions |
| I.P.C. | : | Indian Penal Code |
| I.P.C. | : | International Press Correspondence |
| L.C.C. | : | Left Consolidation Committee |
| N.T.U.F. | : | National Trades Union Federation |
| N.W.F.P. | : | North-West Frontier Province |
| P.C.C. | : | Provincial Congress Committee |
| P.P.T.U.S. | : | Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat |
| R.C.P.I. | : | Revolutionary Communist Party of India |
| R.I.L.U. | : | Red International of Labour Unions |
| R.S.P.I. | : | Revolutionary Socialist Party of India |
| R.T.U.C. | : | Red Trade Union Congress |
| S.I.K.F. | : | South India Kisan Federation |
| U.P. | : | United Provinces |
| W. & P. P. | : | Workers' & Peasants' Party |
| Y.C.L. | : | Young Communist League |

P R E F A C E

'The Left-Wing in India', which is a study of the Left-wing movements and ideas in India, has developed out of a thesis on which I obtained the Ph. D. degree from London School of Economics and Political Science in June, 1955. Entitled "The Origin and Development of the Left-wing Movements and Ideas in India (1919-47)", it was then the first study of its kind attempted anywhere and was characterised a pioneer study by the examiners. It is regretted that despite the recommendations of the examiners that it should be published soon, its publication has been delayed so long. It is divided into two Volumes. Volume One (that is the present one) deals with the origin, growth and development of the various Left-wing movements and ideas in India from their early beginnings after the World War One to the achievement of independence in 1947. The companion Volume Two, a post-doctoral work, deals with the role of the Indian Left in the post-independence period.

The period between World War I when the Left-Wing groups first emerged, and the achievement of independence in 1947, constitutes a distinct epoch in the evolution of these movements; after 1947, the problems which faced the Left-wing changed very radically in character. The overriding feature, which gives a unity to the pre-independence period, is the supremacy of the question of national independence, which was the first concern of all political movements in India.

The Indian National Congress, throughout this period, dominates the political scene in India, and the attitude that the various Left groups adopted towards the Congress is a matter to which considerable attention has to be devoted. The National Congress stood for the unity of the entire nation in the cause of national freedom. The Left-Wing

II

movements, however, emphasized the social and economic problems of the Indian peasantry and workers, and sought to bring them to the forefront of the national movement. Here, therefore, lie two different conceptions concerning the character of the national movement. The particular contribution made by the Left-Wing in the approach to the national problem was the inseparability of the struggle for national freedom from the struggle for the interests of the working people. It was their main purpose to emphasize this, and to try to shape the policy and tactics of the national movement in accordance with this. While, of course, there were many differences of outlook, temperament and ideology, which separated one Left-Wing party or group from the other, it is in the application of their socialist beliefs to the national problem that gives to them a distinctive part in the evolution of Indian politics. Ipso facto, the same characteristic breeds a common difference with the standpoint of the Indian National Congress, which strongly opposed the entry of these class-questions into the national movement, as the Left-Wing desired they should do.

Their emphasis upon the social and economic pattern that would succeed the achievement of independence gave rise to an acute anxiety that power should not be transferred in a manner that would strengthen the position of the Indian vested interests. They all opposed the agreement that was reached in 1947 between the British Government and the leaders of the Indian National Congress, and they did so because they believed that a settlement of the kind that was being arranged would serve to strengthen and promote the development of capitalism in India. Their fundamental postulate that freedom cannot be had by compromise seems, in retrospect, to have been falsified by march of events, though the Leftists still maintain that the independence we got in 1947 was not the type of independence which they had visualised; nor even the type the Congress had set forth as its goal in course of the tortuous years of national struggle.

III

Under these circumstances, the establishment of independence required a reformulation of the programme and tactics of the Left-parties. The unity that existed between them and their qualified support of the National Congress in the various phases of the movement for independence could no longer exist in the same manner. The problems they faced were in many ways quite different from those they had posed before 1947.

As with every writer who is breaking new grounds, I was faced with the problems of what I should attempt to accomplish, and what tools of analysis I should use. In analysing the Left-wing movements and ideas in India, I have avoided interplay of subjective interpretations, and have tried to be as much objective and detached as is possible for a historian of movements involving ideas and ideals, urges and aspirations of numerous human beings. The matter is so presented as to enable the events very largely to speak for themselves. How far I have succeeded in this is, of course, for the readers to judge.

Leftism made its first appearance on the Indian scene only after the World War I. Previous to this period, and throughout the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th changes were taking place in the social, economic and political fields which gradually prepared the grounds for the emergences of Leftism after the War. Under the impact of British rule a transformation of the socio-economic structure of the Indian society took place, leading ultimately to the first establishment of modern industries. The first impact of the Industrial Revolution, as in the West, came as an indignant surprise to the people immersed in an altogether different social, economic and cultural environment, and gave rise to the sporadic protest movements of workers and peasants against the new order. But, as in the West, after a series of spontaneous and instinctive outbursts, they became reconciled to the new order.

Subsequent to these initial reactions, many attempts were made by philanthropists and humanitarians to draw

IV

the attention of the people and the Government to the grievances of labour, especially to the cruel child and woman labour. Out of this agitation arose the first few organizations for labour during the 80's and 90's of the last Century in Bombay and at other places. A few such organizations appeared before the War. These were not trade unions in the proper sense of the term, but they did pioneering work in alleviating some of the outstanding grievances of labour. The services of these organisers lay in the fact that at a period when the all-absorbing passion of the educated middle class politicians was for political and administrative reforms they realised the importance of organising the labourers, and drew the attention of the people generally to labour and to the problems of labour.

The political theorising of this period was largely dominated by the political problem of self-government. The leading thinkers of this period whole-heartedly accepted the principles of Liberalism. But, while in their conception of things there was little place for class-organizations, their importance consisted in having stood for reform-movements in religious, social and political fields. This preoccupation with political problems itself, in a way, precluded the emergence of Leftism at an earlier period by engendering a belief in the politicians that political subjection was the root cause of all misery and that once self-government was obtained, the country would be automatically as it were, prosperous again. Their make-belief was further strengthened by their zealous faith in the liberal principles. Under such an atmosphere of faith and optimism, Leftism, evidently, could not make much headway.

But a transformation in the situation took place after the War. In the industrial field, while there had been growth of industries during the War, the conditions of the workers had worsened. This led to a great strike-wave in the country affecting practically the whole of industrial organization. It was this period of militancy which gave rise to the first trade unions, leading ultimately to the formation of the A.I.T.U.C. in 1920. The most important fac-

tors that thus started operating upon the scene were : the ideals of the British Labour movement; the new consciousness and the new outlook among the workers born out of the experiences during the War; the new political movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, involving new methods of struggle; the Russian Revolution, etc. In the trade union field the influence of the British labour was most apparent. But while this trade unionism was inspired by the ideals of the British labour, it did not imbibe all its ideals and it could not, therefore, form the basis of an Indian Labour Party (as was the desire of the British Labour leaders). Further deterring factors were the immaturity and undeveloped character of the trade unions, inadequate understanding of the ideals of labour movements on the part of those working in the field, and the general apathy of the Nationalist leaders towards independent class-organizations of workers.

At this stage a few educated Indians, inspired by the ideals of the Russian Revolution, started groping towards Marxism, their motive being a desire to promote the national struggle more effectively. Simultaneously came the Hijrat movement which was to provide, along with other Indian exiles in Europe and Asia, a group of educated Indians who were indoctrinated in Communist strategy and tactics in the U.S.S.R. and who were later sent back to organize workers in India. This group, acting under the initiative of the Third Communist International, established the first Communist groups in 1921-22, first abroad at Tashkent (U.S.S.R.) and subsequently in India. The programmatic basis of these young Communist groups was provided by the Colonial Theses of the 2nd Congress of the International (1920). There had been differences between Lenin and M. N. Roy with respect to the exact line to be adopted in the colonies. At the end the unanimous opinion at the Congress was that in dealing with national movements in the colonies, the communists should make a distinction between 'bourgeois-democratic movements' and 'national-revolutionary movements', and should support only the

latter. The communists were also asked to establish independent nuclei of communist activities and party organization in the colonial countries. Communism at this time was still on the level of ideas and propaganda. A few Communists that there were at this stage whole-heartedly supported the Non-Co-operation movement started under the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

The role of Mahatma Gandhi at this stage should not be minimised. Though it is true that Leftism, especially in its Communist variant, arose partly as a reaction against Gandhism, it is also equally true, paradoxical though it might appear, that the Gandhian movement, involving the new technique of mass contact, self-help and direct action, not to speak of the general political awakening that it generated, discredited the old politics of both the Moderates and the Extremists and carried political and public affairs to the level of villages, and to the masses. But the young educated Indians who were thus drawn to the masses could not necessarily remain within the confines of the Gandhian solutions either of the political problem or of the social and economic grievances of the masses. As in other matters, some of them turned to the West, and to the Socialist and Labour movements there.

The years 1922-26 marked a turning point in the nascent Communist activity. After the suspension of the Gandhian movement there was a re-adjustment in Communist strategy and tactics and the Communist activity started along two parallel though connected lines of work. Firstly, among the trade unions it started on the basis of class struggle in opposition to the official line and, secondly, in the political field attempts were made to explore an appropriate political organ through which revolutionary activity could be carried on. Considerable success was achieved in the trade union field to the extent of ousting the official leadership from its dominant position in the A.I.T.U.C. by 1929, and forcing it to secede and form a rival all-India trade union organization. But in the political field they were not successful and between 1925-29 many attempts were made to form a

VII

People's Party, Peasants' and Workers' Parties; though in the process the main purpose of forming a Communist Party was largely neglected; but none made much headway and the two conspiracy cases, the Cawnpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case (1924) and the Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929-33) dealt a severe blow to Indian Communism. It was at its lowest ebb between 1929-33.

Simultaneously with attempts to create these front rank organizations, intended to be mass nationalist platform of workers, peasants and lower middle-class elements working under the hegemony of the proletariat with the purpose of carrying the 'bourgeois democratic revolution' to a successful conclusion, attempts were also being made to create a real, well-organised Communist Party. The handful of Communists, however, had been so preoccupied with the development of front rank organizations that this latter task was largely neglected, and by 1928 there grew up a definite tendency to regard the W. & P.P. as the substitute of the Communist Party; a tendency that came to an abrupt halt when the Sixth Congress of the International put a ban on the W. & P. P. The difficulties of the Indian Communists in this respect were, in no small measure, due to the difficulties of International Communism which until the rise of Mao Se-tung in China, was seeking a suitable form for Communist political mass action in colonial and semi-colonial countries.

There was also a change in the Communist strategy and tactics after the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International (1928), which led the Communists to adopt a new tactical line, keeping aloof from the second Gandhian movement (1930-33) and leaving the Indian National Congress, calling it a bourgeois organization. This led to their isolation from the mass of the national movement.

During this period (1923-27) the theory and practice of the British Labour movement that had started to penetrate into India after the War was still on the agenda, but after repeated attempts projects for an Indian Labour Party

VIII

failed to materialise, though such a short-lived party was formed in 1923.

Meanwhile, a third force, moving in a socialist direction, began to take shape as a Left-Wing inside the Indian National Congress itself, largely under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. It was very much an amorphous group rather than a well-organised and coherent Left-Wing and it consisted of nationalists whose primary allegiance was to the Indian National Congress. They felt that the goal of national freedom, as defined by the Congress, was vague and unrealisable, unless the Congress was brought in touch with the masses (peasants and workers). They came gradually to believe that the mere political concept of freedom, devoid of social and economic concepts, was not enough. They, therefore, turned to the ideals of the Labour movement in the West and they turned to Soviet Russia and to Marxism. In this the discrediting of the capitalist democracy of the West (as they saw it) during the economic depression of 1929-33, the achievements of Soviet Russia under the Five Year Plan and the mistrust of the British labour on nationalistic grounds, all played a part.

But, while they turned to Soviet Russia and to Marxism, in so far as they understood them, they were different from the Indian Communists in as much as they were not wholesale admirers of either Soviet Russia or of Marxism and, moreover, they were nationalists first, owing allegiance to the Indian National Congress and to the goal of National freedom.

Simultaneously, were also being born peasant, youth and student organizations with socialistic leanings; all of them were indicative of the general diffusion of socialism during this period. The peasant organizations, though primarily concerned with economic grievances, did not restrict themselves, in the manner of the official Trade Union Congress, with its policy of non-involvement in politics. While being independent, and often critical of the Indian National Congress, they cannot be said to have been opposed to it; nor, yet to have been parallel to it. But to them,

IX

political freedom meant the establishment of Kisan-Majdoor Raj (peasants' and workers' rule) and they also at times talked of Socialism, class-struggle and so on.

This third force found organizational expression in the founding of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 as a Left-Wing pressure group inside the Indian National Congress. They often professed faith in Marxism, class-struggle and revolution but valued national freedom above all and regarded the Indian National Congress as the only organization capable of leading the country to that goal.

Meanwhile, another force of some importance in the form of M. N. Roy started operating on the scene. Expelled from the Communist International after his so-called "de-colonisation" theory had been rejected by the Sixth Congress in 1928 and his tactics in relation to the Chinese Revolution had been severely criticised; and his handling of the Indian affairs, in so far as it related to the formation of the Communist Party, had been assailed, Roy secretly arrived in India in 1930. Though he still considered himself a Marxist, and at one with International Communism, yet he criticised the International for following a Left-sectarian line, but he also hoped that it would soon return to 'the old saner line' of Marxism-Leninism. On his arrival in India he started work in opposition to the official Indian Communists. But though his supporters toyed with the idea of a working class party for some time, yet in the political field Roy was not in favour of organising another Socialist Party in opposition to the already existing Communist Party because of his hope, which prompted him to give similar advice to the International Communist Opposition group of Thalheimer, etc., to which he belonged, that the C.I. would soon return to the old one. It was because of this, among other things, that he opposed the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. In contrast to the view that he had held at the Second World Congress of the C.I., he now held that the struggle for national freedom could be carried on only on the platform of the Indian National Congress. Develop-

ments in both national and international fields led to a period of United Front between 1935-39. Meeting under the shadow of the growing menace of fascism, the Seventh Congress of the C.I. (1935) criticised the Indian Communists for following a 'Left-sectarian' line and made United Front tactics the order of the day. In India itself, despite ideological differences, the opposition of all Leftist groups, Communists, Congress Socialists and Royists, to the trends towards neo-constitutionalism of the Indian National Congress; their opposition to the new constitutional reforms as embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935; no less than their general opposition to fascism and war, made such a front possible, though it was always based on shaky foundations.

The outbreak of the World War II, the differing attitudes of these groups to the War; their attitude to revolution, which they all thought was fast approaching and of which each group wanted to be leader; their attitude to the Indian National Congress and its method of struggle in the changed circumstances; no less than ideological, tactical and even personal dissensions among them; all these conspired to make the Left unity collapse like a house of cards. Apart from the already existing socialist groups, the War also witnessed a mushroom growth of various other splinter Left groups, like the Bolshevik Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party, etc. Roy also formed an independent party called the Radical Democratic Party. These were mostly centred around individuals, rather than around any distinct ideology, though they tried to evolve ideology out of these differences. Indeed, during the war there was little leftist activity as such.

After the War, the question of Pakistan, and of national freedom dominated the scene for a while and the thought of all the Leftist groups was turned mainly towards these problems and at the way they were sought to be tackled.

Leftism and Rightism are the terms loosely used. Their ideological contents remain elusive and their mean-

ings vague and indefinite. And yet, as Krogh rightly points out, of all political ideas that have gone into shaping our modern world, none has gained wider usage or has wielded greater influence than the left-right concept of political relationships.¹ They reflect the scale by which we evaluate the political thinking of ourselves and others. They also reflect the attitudes with which we look upon change, whether in regard to laws, customs, ideals, cultures, economic arrangements, class-structure, educational systems, religious institutions and creeds, or any other relations of man to man.

The origins of the terms 'left' and 'right' can be traced to the period of the French Revolution. In the National Assembly there were three parties : First, the party of a conservative type which was opposed to any changes in the powers of the monarchy or the privileges of the nobility. The second, of a liberal type, favoured limited reforms. The third was a radical party which demanded a constitution to limit and regulate the powers of the monarch and insisted on wide reforms. The seating arrangement in the Assembly was such that the conservatives sat to the right of the Speaker, the radicals to the left and the liberals in the centre. It is this seating arrangement which has given rise to the use of the left-right directional terms in politics.

The left is generally understood to include those parties and movements that demand wider popular participation in government, push actively for reform and draw particular support from the disinherited, dislocated and disgruntled. The right is generally understood to include the parties and movements that are skeptical of popular government, oppose the bright plans of reforms and draw particular support from men with sizeable stake in the established order.² The right wishes to preserve the exist-

1. Kenneth K. Krogh : *Needed, New Political Labels*, in W. J. Stankiewicz edited *Political Thought since World War II*, p. 445.
2. Krogh : *Opt. Cit.*, p. 446,

ing order, the left wishes to change it. This general concept provides the master frame of reference in which is cast the bulk of all thinking about political phenomena, though the left-right concept is forever shifting ground. As political and economic conditions change, the left-wing position of yesterday tends to become the right-wing position of today. There are two extremes : The extreme left denotes revolutionary radicalism and the extreme right denotes revolutionary reactionism.

Leftism is a tradition which has exerted, and still exerts, a strange influence over some political parties and groups in our country. But Leftism and Rightism, as used in the Indian context today, are loose terminologies. Though Leftism in India has been shorn of some of its traditional conceptual contents, yet Leftism is the most generously used word in relation to the politics of opposition in our country. Lacking a well-defined connotation, it is a peculiar tradition that exerts a strange magic over its adherents. It represents an oppositional attitude to the state, to the government of the day, to the party in power. Negativism, in fact, is a hallmark of the Indian Left. In a positive sense, it stands for revolution if not insurrection; for social change in general and drastic change in property laws in particular; for planning; for nationalisation (or socialisation) of industry and for a society in which there is end of exploitation of man by man and wherein the 'masses' and the 'haves-nots' have a feeling that they are masters of the situation.

A number of distinctive features of the Indian Left during the period under review, can be pin-pointed. First is their radical, militant, revolutionary, uncompromising and anti-imperialistic role inside the national movement as symbolised by the Indian National Congress. Secondly, they refused to regard the national movement as a mere political movement for freedom, and sought to link it with the broad social-economic demands of the masses, and with their independent class-organizations. Thirdly, the Left was distinguished from the Right by its greater faith in violence. Fourthly, they had links with, and their move-

ments bore the impact of, the international socialist movement, by which, of course, they meant the movement based on Marxian socialism. In these broad terms it was usual, during the national movement in its last decades, to speak of the Congress Left and the Congress Right. This study purports to be an understanding into this Indian Left in all its ramifications.

Finally, I have to make a number of grateful acknowledgements. Firstly, to Prof. M. J. Oakeshott under whose scholarly and sympathetic guidance and encouragement I worked while in London. Secondly, I would express my most sincere thanks to Prof. Morris-Jones who, as an expert on India, assisted me greatly in his capacity as my supervisor. He had to undertake the painstaking job of going through the lengthy thesis for several months. His comments and criticisms were most helpful and without his active support and co-operation it would have been difficult to finish this work.

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XIV

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Muzaffarpur
The 19th April, 1960.

L. P. SINHA

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction.

Considered either as a movement or as a body of ideas, Leftism, as the synonym for socialism in general, is a phenomenon of recent origin in India. Before the World War One there was not only no socialism in the country either in the form of political parties or groups or in the shape of individual socialist thinkers, but even trade unions or workers' organisations, in the real sense of the term, were non-existent; though various attempts were being made during this period at organisations for workers by a host of philanthropists, humanitarians and men of good will and social conscience.

The conception of socialism, at least in the form we know today, is a product of modern capitalistic-industrialistic era, and to have expected or demanded socialism in earlier periods of Indian history would have tantamounted to demanding something well in advance of the given stage of social and economic development. As will be pointed out later, there were reasons why, even after industrialisation had belatedly and half-heartedly begun and the evils of capitalism came increasingly to be felt, socialism could not arise in India.

Factory industries in India are a comparatively recent growth. India being a politically dependent country prevented her normal economic growth, the systematic imperialist policy being to thwart any real industrialization. However, the political and economic interests of Imperialism necessitated the establishment of industries of particular categories.

First attempts at industrial development can be traced back to the close of the 18th century when dockyards and *roperies* were started to meet the requirements of shipping at Calcutta. Almost simultaneously were

started tea-plantations in Assam. Coal-mining dates back to 1824. There were attempts at iron smelting between 1839 and 1855, but the Bengal Iron Co. was formed only in 1875, and the largest iron and steel industry, the Tata, was started in 1911.

The advent of Factory Industries entailed a radical transformation of the socio-economic structure of the Indian Society. The Industrial Revolution, everywhere, was in itself of great revolutionary significance, but in India, it was more so. To understand this properly we have first to take note of the preceding social transformation, by which the pre-capitalist Feudal Society was destroyed, and the widespread repercussions that followed from it. This is associated with the establishment of the new land relations and new revenue systems, supplanting the old village communes.

The Indian feudal society, with its characteristic village-commune based on a subsistence economy, which embraced all the agricultural and handicraft requirements of the village, was replaced by the new revenue systems and new land relations based on a money-economy which split Indian society into social classes hitherto unknown. Thus, slowly the socio-economic face of the Indian society became transformed almost beyond recognition.

The new arrangements created problems for Indian society, problems which were not known before, or else were known in an altogether different form. The reason for this was that not only was this transformation in its destructive phase not carried out completely, but even the constructive steps towards industrialisation were slow and hesitant; coupled with that was the imperialist exploitation. In European countries the change-over from feudalism to capitalism was accompanied by the twin processes of rapid industrialisation and introduction of scientific technology in agriculture; above all it involved a close and organic relationship between agriculture and industry. But in India as the pace of industrialisation was very slow, the number of unemployed, which increas-

ed beyond all proportion due to destruction of village artisan industries and town handicrafts, could not find alternative employment. They turned to agriculture, but as agriculture itself was in a state of disorganisation and resultant chaos, this led to over-pressure on agriculture. This process, involving disproportionate increase of population based on agriculture, has been termed "de-industrialisation".¹

Under new land relations a new class of landlords unknown before emerged. While the cess that they were to pay to the Government was fixed, the rent that they were to receive from the agriculturists was not; they were free to fix these and in many cases the initial fixation was exorbitantly high. Moreover, the payment now was to be made in cash and not in kind, as had been the case in pre-British India which meant that even though crops failed (which was a frequent occurrence in India due to the failure of Monsoon, lack of irrigation facilities etc) the peasant had to pay the fixed amount. The necessity of finding money to pay rents readily gave rise to the emergence of another class: the class of money-lenders. The features of the new system were soon plain to see: the progressive impoverishment of the agricultural population, the steady growth of their indebtedness, the increasing expropriation of the peasants of their land and their transformation into paupers or agricultural proletariat.

The resulting social structure also displayed a lack of balance between institutions and ideas. This disjunction in society, with its attendant social and psychological manifestations, was an understandable consequence of the disappearance of the old world without the creation of a new one. Under the impact of the new order the old customary relationships prevalent in the village communes were destroyed, while new ones were not easily formed. The characteristic feature of the whole transformation

1. K. S. Shelvanker: *Problem of India*, P. 131.

was that it was part of a political process imposed from without. In this the social revolution in India differs from that in the West, where the social upheavals were a part of the socio-economic processes evolving from within.

The results of this half-hearted, hesitant industrialisation itself were no less disturbing. The village artisans, town handicraftsmen and landless labourers (that is, the three classes from which the factory workers were recruited) were confronted with altogether new conditions, new modes and new ways of work. In contrast to the old, the new industries were competitive; they introduced wage-system, and large-scale production using modern machine methods. They transformed the village craftsmen into unskilled industrial workers and brought into being two new classes, the capitalist and the proletariat; at the same time the old personal relationship and co-operation between the employers and employees were broken off and the old customary and traditional relationships were abolished.

Inside the factories, there prevailed unlimited hours of work, there being no regulatory legislation. There was no provision for rest, no law to regulate the conditions of work, inadequate pay, cruel child and women labour, no housing facilities, no Sundays and no holidays. Men, women and children had to work from 12, 16, 18 and occasionally even 23 hours a day.¹ An official document dated 1833, speaks of this gruesome state of affairs: "Labourers whom nothing would have induced to work more than six hours in twenty-four (under native rule) and who often declined to work at all on a cloudy day, were willing to toil from sunrise to sunset (under British rule)".² Giving evidence before the Bombay Factory Labour Commission of 1885 a manager maintained: "In ordinary seasons the engine starts

1. R. K. Das: *Factory Labour in India*, PP. 55-60.

2. Quoted in *India (Impressions and suggestions)* by J. Keir Hardie, Preface.

between 4 and 5 A.M. and stops at 7, 8 or 9 P.M. without any stoppage during the day In busy seasons the gins and presses sometimes work both night and day with half an hour rest in the evening. The same set continues working day and night for about 8 days, and when it is impossible to go any longer, other sets of hands were produced."¹

The conditions of workers so far as wages are concerned were no less miserable. In the Assam Act of 1865 the monthly wages for tea plantation workers were fixed at Rs. 5 for a man, Rs. 4 for a woman and Rs. 3 for a child. For jute no reliable statistics on wages are available, still it is estimated that in 1896 the monthly wage for an unskilled worker was Rs. 4 and that for a skilled worker was maximum of Rs. 18. For coal it is estimated that in 1860 a family composed of wife and children earned Rs. 9 per month. According to an official calculation in 1877 the monthly wages for textile workers in Bombay averaged from ten to fifteen rupees for men and from seven to nine rupees for women, and five to seven for children. For iron and steel no reliable statistics exist.

UNREST AMONG PEASANTS AND WORKERS

(Stray spontaneous protests, strikes and uprisings)

These factors, industrial, social, economic, psychological and occasionally even political, together with purely natural factors like an occasional failure of Monsoon and semi-social factors like epidemics of plague and cholera, created waves of unrest among the peasants and workers. When, as aggravated by some local causes, conditions became unbearable, then, throwing off their fatalistic resignation, philosophic forbearance and their habitual, proverbial passivity, peasants and workers, without leaders, without any organisation and without any experience, rose spontaneously, though often spas-

1. *Parliamentary Papers, 1888, Vol. 77. pp. 13-15.*

modically and sporadically, in protest against exploitation by the landlords, the moneylenders and the capitalist employers. In their first primitive and spontaneous forms the anger of and unrest among the peasants found expression in isolated actions of revenge and violence against individual moneylenders and landlords. It was this atmosphere of discontent and distress among the masses of the people that lent popular support to the Great Rebellion of 1857. There were peasant uprisings in widely separate regions of the country. The most important of these were : the Santhal Insurrection (1855-56) ; the Indigo Cultivators' strike (1860) ; the Bengal Peasant Uprisings in Pabna and Bogra (1872) ; the Maratha Peasant Uprisings (1875-76), and the Moplah Uprisings (1836-96). They were manifestations of the genuine grievances of the peasants and workers against the highhandedness of the landlords and the moneylenders as well as the planters in the indigo and tea plantation industries. The strikers gained widespread sympathy from many intellectuals of this period including some European clergymen.

The conditions in plantation industries were simply horrible. It was depicted by Dina Bandhu Mitra in his novel, the *Mirror of Indigo*. Buchanan describes the wretched conditions of these workers as follows :—"His work was hard and of a sort to which he was unaccustomed. Housing was generally inadequate even for his meagre standards and owing to lack of transportation facilities, food was scarce and extremely dear in these distant, unsettled regions. Undernourishment and disease, working upon an originally poor physique, quite incapacitated many coolies for a day's work. Flogging became common. Like the slaves of the South many Indian coolies undertook to run away but although they were free men their chances were little better than those of the Southern slaves." ¹

1. D. H. Buchanan : *The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India*, pp. 37-38.

Many of these manifestations were peaceful to begin with, though resort was later taken to violence. In many cases the aim was to destroy the bond-papers of the landlords and the moneylenders. The Bengal Indigo Cultivators' strike was notable from the beginning, a precursor of the similar movements among the peasantry in the Gandhian era.

In the industrial field there were riots and other forms of disturbances in the latter half of the 19th century, particularly in the tea-plantations in Assam. There were also some strikes in factories, the earliest record being that in 1877 in the Empress Mill at Nagpur over wage rates. There were other manifestations of protests. In sheer anguish and disgust and irritation, the workers broke windows, mishandled machines and expressed their anger in very many other ways. It was also in the wake of this period of unrest that the Indian National Congress was formed in the year 1885.

To one who is weaving out a story of the Indian Left for the first time and prone to construct a pattern analogous to that in the West, there is a strong temptation to characterise this phase as one of Chartism. The resemblances consist in the fact that it was the first "working class movement" (taking "working class" in a broader sense to include the industrial workers, the landless agriculturers and impoverished peasantry) in India, and as with Chartism it originated with hunger and starvation and extreme desperation. The movement in India also had a Physical Force wing and a Moderate wing, though the Physical Force wing preponderated here (the supreme example of the Moderate wing being the Bengal Indigo Cultivators' Strike, and that of the Physical Force, the Santhal Insurrection).

The Indian movement, if movement it can be called at all, embraced more the peasants than the workers for the simple reason that (i) workers at this stage were infinitesimally small in number and (ii) there was no divorcement between the peasantry and workers.

The Chartist Movement was preceded by such workers' organisations as the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union, London Workingmen's Association etc; it had its leaders like Lovett, Harney, O' Brien etc; it had been influenced by the radical writings of men like Charles Hall, John Bray, W. Thompson, Thomas Hodgskin, John Gray and, above all, Robert Owen; it threw forth some excellent leaders in the course of its development and it concentrated its grievances in the six-point political demands contained in the Charter. In India nothing of the sort happened. There were no organisations, no leaders, nor yet any consciously formulated demands, political or otherwise. The solitary example of some sort of a general demand, as distinguished from protestations by others against specific grievances, was made by the Santhal Insurrectionists in letters addressed to the Government and several zamindars (landlords) wherein they stated their solid determination to get rid of the oppression of the landlords and the moneylenders and to take possession of the country and set up a government of their own.

In fact, properly speaking, it was not even a movement. There was no link between one occurrence and another. They remained what they were : protests and uprisings against oppressions perpetuated by landlords, moneylenders and bureaucrats of the specific areas concerned. In common with Chartism and similar movements in other countries, it was largely a revolt against the new system, and the peasants and workers were looking backwards in as much as they felt instinctive hostility towards the new system, and were, in part, driven through revivalist motivations.

Philanthropy and Organisations for Labour

These spontaneous efforts were mostly unsuccessful, as they were bound to be. Inexperienced, unorganised and leaderless, the peasants and workers could not command the strength to force a bargain with their employers and the landlords, especially so in a country where subs-

titute labour was always plentiful and could be used to undermine strikes. Moreover, the workers had still to realise that the new ways and new conditions of work, against which they were so blindly protesting, demanded new forms of organised action.

The failure of Chartism in England was followed by non-revolutionary, moderate and cautious lines of work. In India, too, this period of upheaval was followed by moderate, peaceful and constitutional methods for redress of grievances. For a brief period in the beginning there were a few attempts to organise on 'panchayat' lines, those traditional institutional patterns with which the peasants and workers were accustomed, but these attempts were short-lived. Soon after came forward philanthropists and humanitarians and other men of social conscience who were deeply moved by cruelties connected with the use of child and female labour. They started agitations with a view to drawing the attention of the Government and the public to the wretched conditions of child and women labour and to point out the necessity of regulating their hours of work. With this began the second phase of the movement for labour in India which may be called the Regulative Period. The personalities that stand out most prominently in this endeavour were : S. S. Bengalee, N. M. Lokhande and Dr. J. N. Nair. They were liberals and constitutionalists and believed in reason and the power of reason over all human affairs. If conditions under which children and women worked were frightful, then the Government and the people at large must be rationally persuaded to realise that it was so. Once the Government was so persuaded, they believed, ameliorative actions were bound to follow.

Another factor which gave a fillip to these agitational, organisational efforts was the rivalry between the Indian and Lancashire manufacturers. The cheap labour of the Indian factories, run by the British and Indian owners, competed seriously with the textiles of Lancashire, and the British owners at home demanded that the Indian

Government prevent the excessive exploitation of the Indian workers. Whatever might be the motive, this immensely encouraged those in India who had already felt the need for such measures. The agitation in India and the interests of the Lancashire millowners, combined to pave the way for the appointment of the Factory Commission of 1875. However, the majority of this Commission did not see any necessity for regulation of factory work. Thinking that this might be due to the fact that the case of labour went unrepresented, the philanthropists, under the leadership of S. S. Bengalee, started an agitation to draw attention to the pitiable conditions of labour in factories. This formed the nucleus of the movement for labour in India. Mr. Bengalee also made strenuous efforts to bring the question before the Bombay Legislature but he failed, whereupon he appealed to Manchester for support. This led to a fresh agitation in England where there was a motion in the House of Commons on April 4, 1879. At last the Bombay Legislative Council passed a Bill in 1881 regulating child labour. This Act made illegal the employment of children below the age of seven, fixed nine hours as the maximum working hours per day for children between seven and twelve and also declared for them a weekly day of rest.

However, the non-inclusion of provisions for women labour in the Act led to a fresh agitation and the Commission of 1884 was the result. But the manufacturers in India again started a counter-agitation to minimise the importance of any amendment. Out of this period of agitations emerged the first leader for labour in India, Mr. Narain Meghjee Lokhande. He began life as a worker and may be regarded as the father of the labour movement in India. It was largely on his initiative that a conference of the Bombay workers was held on September 23-26, 1884. This conference drew up a memorandum signed by 5,500 workers to be presented to the Commission. It requested for (i) one complete day of

rest every Sunday, (ii) half an hour recess at noon, (iii) limitation of hours of work, (iv) compensation for injuries, etc.

An attempt was also made to agitate in favour of applying to India some of the recommendations of the International Labour Conference held at Berlin in March, 1890. With this end in view a mass meeting of the Bombay factory workers numbering well above 10,000 was held at Bombay in 1890. It was remarkable in that for the first time in labour history in India two women delegates addressed this conference. It drew up workers' demands which included : limitation of hours of work for women to 11 per day, limitation of hours of work for children (9 to 12 years) to seven per day, provision of weekly holidays for women and children and the advisability of the same in the case of adults, fixation of the working day for the male operatives, and a compulsory interval of rest at midday.

It was also at this time (1890) that Lokhande formed an association of the Bombay mill workers called "The Bombay Millhands' Association", with Lokhande as President and D. C. Athaide as Secretary. The Association was more or less a clearing house for the grievances of the Bombay millhands. It was the first organisation for labour in India. In 1898 Lokhande also started a paper called *Dinabandhu* or *Friend of the Poor*, the first labour journal in India.

It is to be noted, however, that the Bombay Millhands' Association was not a labour organisation with the structure and aims of a trade union. Lokhande, indeed, was a philanthropic promoter of labour legislation and of workers' welfare. The attitude to the poor, as of the whole movement, was paternalistic. The grievances of the working men were presented, not as matters of right, but in the manner of an appeal to reason and human feeling. As Das rightly observes : "The philanthropic agitation was the forerunner of the

modern labour movement. Having originated in philanthropy, its motive was sympathy rather than justice.”¹ The very name of the journal, i.e. the *Friend of the Poor*, illustrates this conclusion. In this connection the verdict of the report on the working of the Factory Act in Bombay (1892) is also quite significant : “The Bombay millhands have no organised trade union. It should be explained that although Mr. Lokhande, who served on the last Factory Commission, describes himself as president of the Bombay Millhands’ Association, that Association has no existence as an organised body, having no roll of membership, no funds and no rules Mr. Lokhande simply acts as a voluntary adviser to any millhands who may come to him.”

The passing of the Factory Act of 1891 brought to an end this phase of the Indian labour movement, the chief object of which was the regulation of child and women labour. The main provisions of this Act were : a midday stoppage of work for half an hour, weekly holiday, fixation of the working hours of women to 11 per day, prohibition of night work for women, the lower and higher limits of age for children as 9 and 14 respectively, and their maximum hours of work as seven per day, etc.

For some time afterwards there was a decline in the labour movement. From 1890, however, there started another phase of the labour movement which lasted till 1917, and which may be called the Abolition Period. The two dominating forces of this phase were : (a) agitations for the abolition of the indentured system of labour and (b) attempts at organising the workers into what might be called quasi-trade unions. A marked feature of this phase was the increasing number of strikes. Two strikes occurred in Bombay in 1894 but they were of little consequence. The first big strike to be officially recorded occurred at Ahmedabad in February, 1895 in which about

1. *Op. cit.* p. 45.

8,000 workers participated but it also was unsuccessful. In 1897, a very serious plague-epidemic occurred in the South, and following this labour troubles occurred in many places. During the first decade of the present century political life was marked by an ascendancy in the tone of the nationalist movement; though not linked with it, there occurred many strikes during this period : in 1903 a strike in the Madras Government Press lasting for six months, in 1905 in the Government of India Press, Calcutta, in 1907 in Samastipur Workshop, etc.

Another feature of this phase was that following upon the political unrest some intellectuals began taking interest in labour organisations. Quite a few organisations came into existence. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Workers of India and Burma was founded in 1897 and was registered under the Companies Act, 1882 ; Seamen's Club was formed in 1895 under the influence of the Rev. Father Hopkings and J. Henson, who had been associated with the National Sailors Union and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland respectively; Press workers formed a union in 1905 ; the Calcutta Seamen's Union was formed in 1906 and the Bombay Postal Union in 1907. In 1908 S. M. Moghal Jan founded the Indian Seamen's Anjuman with the objective of rendering help to the distressed seamen. The Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha (the Workers' Welfare Association) was founded by B. R. Nare, S. R. Bole and N. A. Talcherkar in 1910. The latter also started a weekly paper called the Kamgar Samachar (the Labour News). The warpers in the Ahmedabad Cotton Mills formed a Union in 1917. It was about this time that the Government of India appointed a Commission and in 1911 limited the working day for male workers to 11 hours.

None of these organisations, properly speaking, can claim the title of trade unions. They were loosely organised, with no definite aims and constitutions. The sole aim of all these organisations, agitations and conferences

was to appeal to Government for legislation. They failed to comprehend the real meaning of the labour question. Trade unions, as real workers' organisations, have to be distinguished from "the participation of workers in agitation led by other classes and expressing the ideas of other classes".¹ They must be based upon "a sense of common status and a common need for mutual help."² As Webbs maintained, a trade union is a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives. None of these organisations for workers before World War One can stand these tests, and hence cannot be called trade unions.

Another feature of these organisations and of the leaders behind them, was their lack of radicalism. They relied on petitions, memoranda and other constitutional methods and worked in co-operation with the Government officials and employers. This was a vindication of the spirit of Victorian Liberalism in which they were nurtured. Looking back it is easy to point out many flaws in their work. Indeed Mr. Lokhande and others were often denounced as being mere reactionary propagandists against the demands of the Indian politicians rather than champions of labour rights. But it should not be forgotten that (a) they did a pioneering work in agitation for labour, stressing the need for legislation regulating hours of work for women and children, and (b) that they realised at a period when labour propaganda was almost an unknown factor in Indian politics that the salvation of labour lay in its ability to make an organised effort against the conditions of work and employment. They were persistent labour agitators and were in intimate touch with the daily life of workers. They exposed the inhuman conditions of labour life. Lokhande's role did a measure of good in the early stages

1. G. D. H. Cole: *A short History of the British Working class*, P. 11.

2. *Ibid*, p. 11.

of the first Factory Acts in India. Their work also produced, in howsoever rudimentary a form, a consciousness among the Bombay millworkers of their wretched conditions of work and a desire for united action.

A further characteristic of these organisations was their complete apathy to politics. Having been stimulated and originated by the philanthropists and humanitarians who themselves were motivated solely by the ideals of service to the poor, these organisations were concerned mainly with obtaining remedial measures to their immediate grievances and not with any involvement in obtaining political rights. The only exception to this was the general strike of the Bombay workers against the sentence of the extremist nationalist leader, B. G. Tilak in 1908,¹ and the support given and various actions taken, by some of the workers' organisations to the war measures of the Government during the 1914-18 War. Prominent among these was the activity of the Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha in co-operating with the Government for carrying on propaganda among the Bombay workers in favour of war efforts. As already indicated, the indentured system, under which Indian labourers were sent to the British colonies outside India, also gave rise to a protest movement during this period.

The existence of the organisational weakness, which was readily apparent and the slow development of trade unionism, taken together with the absence of a radical content to the movement, finds explanation, in view of the Royal Commission on Labour in India (1928), inherent to the nature and character of Indian labour at that time.

1. In 1908 B. G. Tilak was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for an article, published in his paper "Keshari", advocating use of violence. The strike, though political, was confined to Bombay only. It was with reference to this strike that Lenin had greeted the Indian proletariat as already matured sufficiently to wage a class-conscious political mass struggle; though no doubt an exaggeration.

(a) Indian Labour was still largely migratory. Commenting upon its nature the Factory Commission of 1908 observed : "The habits of the Indian factory operative are determined by the fact that he is primarily an agriculturist, or a labourer on the land. In almost all cases his hereditary occupation is agriculture, his home is in the village from which he comes, and not in the city in which he labours ; his wife and family continue to live in that village, he regularly remits a portion of wage there, and he returns there periodically to look after and to obtain rest after the strain of factory life. There is as yet practically no factory population such as exists in European countries consisting of large number of operatives trained from their youth to one particular class of work and dependent upon employment at that work for their livelihood."¹

(b) The conditions of industrial life then existing in the country were not conducive to the unflagging endeavour which proved so necessary in the West for the maintenance of trade unions; those whose wages and leisure were barely adequate for sustained work in the factory were not likely to find energy or leisure for activity outside it.

(c) The poverty of the average Indian worker who generally comes from the poorest and the most down-trodden section of society was so abysmal that the worker, already incumbered with debt, could not pay even the small subscription. Fear of dismissal in a country where labour was cheap always weighed heavily with the worker. Moreover, the employers at this stage did not favour workers' organisations.

(d) There were differences of race, language, caste, creed and religion among the workers. Rivalry and jealousy and dissensions existed among the workers on these accounts. The workers came from different parts

1. *Report of the Factory Commission (1908)*, p. 18.

of the country and spoke different languages, thus making communication and communion difficult. But it has also to be noted that, while being hindrances, these affinities at the same time also helped to bring workers of the same caste or group together. For example, Dr. J. M. Nair organised non-Brahmin labourers in Madras.

(e) The religious, philosophical climate in India generated a general attitude of fatalism and resigned acceptance of their conditions of life by the workers. The philosophy of 'Law of Karma' produced an attitude to life which was not conducive to the growth of any organisational, institutional endeavour here upon this earth.

(f) The worker generally hailed from countryside where there was no tradition of organisation, such as the guild tradition in the West.

(g) Lack of democratic spirit and education was a further limiting factor. As the Royal Commission on Indian Labour maintained: "Trade Unionism to be fully effective demands two things: a democratic spirit and education. The democratic ideal has still to be developed in the Indian workers, and lack of education is the most serious obstacle of all."¹

(h) The workers were small in number and lacked cohesion. In a country predominantly agricultural nobody as yet visualised their role. Even the workers themselves did not realize either their importance in society or their hidden strength. In a society ridden with caste distinctions, they were looked down upon as 'untouchables' and 'low caste coolies'.²

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 321.

2. *Following is the figure of skilled and unskilled workers industry-wise for the year 1895:*

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|----|----|----|----------|----------|
| Tea | .. | .. | .. | 5,53,821 | workers. |
| Jute | .. | .. | .. | 1,33,162 | " |
| Coal | .. | .. | .. | 84,805 | " |
| Cotton Textiles | .. | .. | .. | 1,16,000 | " |

[Reliable figure for Iron and Steel is not available.]

(i) Last but not the least was the ignorance about trade unionism and labour movements in the West. In almost all the countries of Asia Left Wing ideas were 'imported' ready made from the West. The acquisition and dissemination of any such knowledge depended upon the intelligentsia, the intellectuals being the purveyors of knowledge and moving spirit behind many such movements. There were, however, social, political and even ideological reasons why such ideologies did not make any headway so far as the leaders of thought of this period were concerned. Though many important leaders of thought of this period had been educated in the West, they only imbibed the spirit of Victorian Liberalism, and were unaffected by any socialistic ideologies. A further impeding factor was the non-availability in India of books on socialism and labour movements in the West which could create interest in socialism. The systematic government policy in this matter for long remained unduly stringent.

These limiting factors continued to operate, in varying manner, for many more decades and to that extent handicapped the growth not only of trade unions but also of socialist and labour movements as a whole. The liberal intellectuals of this period were a product of a multitude of influences but central to their thinking was the spirit of nationalism. But the school was by no means homogeneous. Some were attracted by the ideals of European civilisation, specially its libertarian thought and humanistic spirit; some laid emphasis on social reforms, others on political and administrative reforms, while a few concerned themselves with the grievances of labour. Some of the labour agitations referred to earlier owed much of their origin to the latter. It was this liberal class which was responsible for the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885. In Calcutta under the auspices of the Brahmo Samaj, the Working Men's Mission was established in 1878 which preached practical religion and morality, established night schools for workmen and the depressed classes. In this connection

mention may also be made of the Servants of India Society founded in 1905 by the nationalist leader Gokhale, and the Social Service League founded in 1911 under the patronage of the Society. The objects of the League were : (a) the collection and study of social facts, the discussion of social theories and social problems with a view to ameliorate the physical, moral, mental and economic conditions of the people, (b) adoption of measures for training social workers, (c) adoption of measures for organisation of charities and social work. Since 1911-12, and largely under the inspiration of the Society, efforts were made to organise cooperative societies among the agriculturists and the millhands in Bombay and elsewhere. The Society interested itself in the beginning with workers' condition, sanitation, etc. and made representations to the Government and was, in its turn, consulted by the Government on labour legislation. The Society also started a Cooperative Quarterly. Though the Society did a good deal of social service work in the early phases of its existence, it became mostly ineffective during the Gandhian period after the World War One.

These intellectuals were so convinced of their methods and ideals that they proved impervious to socialistic influence although some of them had come in contact with the socialists of Great Britain and other European countries. Among these were Dadabhai Naoroji, Lala Lajpat Rai, B. G. Tilak, etc.

A strikingly typical example is Dada Bhai Naoroji who had contacts with Hyndman, Keir Hardie and Sydney Webb and was a personal friend of all of them. We have record of a striking correspondence between Dadabhai and Hyndman. Hyndman apparently was not satisfied with the moderate, constitutional approach of Dadabhai and whenever he got an opportunity, he always tried to preach doctrines of socialism, effective agitation and revolution. In a letter dated August 2, 1882, Hyndman wrote : "Nothing can be done in India until we have a revolution here. The upper and middle classes

will not listen and don't care. I am, therefore, striving to bring about a revolution by peaceful means, if possible, but at critical moment I should not shrink from force if we were strong enough."¹ In the same letter Hyndman asked Dadabhai not to look to upper classes of England but only to the working classes for help. Without admitting this disparagement of the value of upper classes to the cause of reforms, Dadabhai wrote back: "If the labouring classes are moved, there is no doubt much good can be done. You have undertaken a very difficult task—a peaceful revolution and I wish you heartily every success." But Hyndman was not to give up the attempt. In a letter dated August 21, 1884, he again spoke of the House of Commons as "played out as an active force" and urged the need for effective agitation. But Dadabhai again wrote back entreating Hyndman to avoid use of "such positive statements as an insurrection is certain within next few months or years." But despite this cold response Hyndman and his Social Democratic Federation continued to preach on the ruinous effect of the British rule in India, and on Socialism and Revolution.

If Dadabhai could not be converted to Socialism, neither would he listen to those in India who accused him for the "dangerous policy" of seeking the support of the Socialists. In a long sharp reply he wrote that it was an unexpected good fortune that the Indian cause had been taken up by a powerful and advancing organisation to whom the future largely belonged. To him, as to all men of his school, there was nothing wrong or unscrupulous in seeking the help and support of all men of good faith, be they Socialists, Liberals or Conservatives.

Dadabhai also became acquainted with the international Socialists. It is, however, always advisable to remember that such associations were not symptoms of his conversion to Socialism but an indication of the

1. Quoted in R. P. Masani: *Dada Bhai Naoroji*, p. 200.

frustration of his hopes at the hands of the Liberals in Britain. In August 1904 he attended the International Socialist Conference at Amsterdam and was given a rousing reception. He informed this body that the future, as he saw it, lay in the hands of the working classes. He further observed that working men in India constituted the immense majority of the people and that they appealed to working men of the whole world.

But despite these contacts, these politicians could not concern themselves with Socialism or with any doctrine preaching a radical programme. In fact, as Sir George Schuster and Guy Wint rightly remark, they represented the rising Indian bourgeoisie still in its infancy and economically weak and sought to play in India the same part as the bourgeoisie in the Europe of that time.¹ Naturally they valued Nationalism above everything else and considered it to be above all "class-interests". To them, therefore, any discussion of "class problems" was inadmissible. They conceived self-government in purely political terms. In the economic sphere they could not conceive of a more just economic arrangement than capitalism. They also entertained the idea that once India was a self-governing people, it would be, automatically as it were, a happy and prosperous country again. These leaders were possessed of the idea that political freedom would of itself nurture and develop a social system that was more just and equitable. Whatever its validity, this idea remained as a powerful influence until as late as thirties when Socialists and other Left elements inside the Indian National Congress were required to put a strenuous fight in advancing their own view that the misery of the Indian people was not only due to the foreign rule, but also due to the unjust and exploitative social and economic order inside India itself. Therefore, they argued that such social problems would still exist even after the foreign domination had

1. *George Schuster and Guy Wint: India and Democracy, p. 91.*

end.d. However, it has to be noted that to support even political demands, there arose a new school of economic thought in India whose authors were R. C. Dutt, Dadabhai Naoroji and W. Digby. They took up the economic aspect of the British occupation and demonstrated that under it there was continued impoverishment of the country. Dadabhai even invented the famous Drain Theory to prove this.

Be that as it may, this liberal spirit found expression in the early policy and programme of the Indian National Congress with which all these leaders were associated. They regarded the Congress as a political body to represent their political aspirations. The leaders themselves were aware that the Congress did not directly represent the masses but only interpreted their grievances. Lala Lajpat Rai, the nationalist leader, thought that it was neither inspired by the people nor advised or planned by them, and that it touched only the upper middle class.

In this sense, by keeping the intellectuals preoccupied with nationalist aspirations, the political subjection of India not only prevented the early emergence of socialism but even retarded its growth when it did appear. This indeed has been a recurrent counterbalancing factor so far as the development of Socialist Movement and Thought is concerned. Even after independence the continuing need of national unity and national cohesion have had a detracting influence upon the appeal of Socialism.

Referring to this school of nationalism mention should also be made of the terrorists and revolutionaries. The rise of the terrorists and revolutionaries was an indication of a cleavage in the national movement. Arising due to disillusionment in respect of the programme and method of the Moderates it was a protest on the part of the youthful sections against the policy of the Congress leaders. They mostly hailed from the 'petty-bourgeois' elements of the Indian society

and no doubt their motives had roots in the economic discontent of this class, but in a manner not uncharacteristic of this social stratum, they did not base their activities on social and economic demands, turning to the futile cult of "bomb" and individual "terrorism". The terrorist revolutionaries were active in Bengal, Bihar, the U.P., the Punjab and Bombay. In Bengal the revolutionary movement was emotional and psychological and it assumed a mystical, religious tone, but there were intellectuals too. They all shared the faith of the elder politicians that political subjection was the root cause of all misery. In the beginning the revolutionary groups were recruited exclusively from the Hindu middle class and were even actively anti-Muslim, regarding the Muslims as an obstacle to the attainment of Indian freedom. This was particularly true of the Bengal revolutionaries. Among these terrorists and revolutionary groups mention may be made of the following. In Bengal, in 1905, was formed the "Anusilan Society" based on a terrorist cult ; in 1907 was formed the "Yugantar Group" by the Bengal revolutionaries like B. K. Ghosh and Bhupendra Nath Dutt. Outside India the revolutionaries from the Punjab formed the Ghadar (Rebel) Party in San Francisco in 1913, though the Ghadar movement was no ordinary terrorist movement. It was founded not by the middle-class youth but by Punjabi peasants who had gone to the U.S.A. to earn money, and became labourers in farms and factories. The aim of the Ghadar Party was the overthrow of the imperialist rule in India and the building up in its place of a national republic based on freedom and equality. In the first elections Sohan Singh Bhakna was elected President and Lala Har Dayal, the Oxford-educated radical, Secretary. Lala Har Dayal was an anarchist, anti-British nationalist, who even sometimes called himself a Socialist. Most of these Ghadarites, on return to India, were arrested, and the Government started what is called the First Lahore Conspiracy case (1915). Twenty-four were sentenced to death with confiscation of property ; twenty-six were

sentenced to transportation for life with confiscation of property ; others were given varying sentences. All these groups believed in the violent overthrow of the British rule and many of them acted in league with the Germans during the First World War. The importance of these groups for our study consists in the fact that many prominent Left leaders and workers in the Punjab, Bengal and elsewhere of the later period were converts from the one or the other of these groups.

International Socialism and India

The political subjection of India, and the intellectuals preoccupied with nationalist aspirations, prevented in the ways indicated above, the early emergence of Socialism. The question of Socialism in India was not primarily one of contact between the Indians and the British or other Socialists for even though on an extremely limited scale, such contacts were always there. The crucial problem—and it was properly the concern of the International Socialists—was the problem of the practical application of Socialism in colonial and semi-colonial, backward countries, then struggling for national freedom. Valuing nationalism above everything else and knowing little or nothing of the A B C of Socialism, they were often prone to explain or expect Socialism in terms of Nationalism.

The documents concerned of the Second International before World War I give us some idea of the situation.¹ Theoretically speaking the International Socialists had no doubt that Socialism was a desirable goal even for the colonial countries, but how it was to be applied under the existing circumstances was a problem that seems to have defeated them. There were the two allied problems of political domination and economic domination. In the economic sphere there was the question of capitalism and its role in the colonies. While on the one

1. *The most important of these Conferences from our point of view were: Paris Conference (1900), Amsterdam Conference (1904) and Stuttgart Conference (1907).*

hand, it was a system of exploitation, on the other hand, its role was objectively progressive in opening up access to natural resources, developing production and modern means of communication. Again, to the orthodox Socialists, was the long-standing, if somewhat doctrinaire, problem of the applicability of Socialism in the economically backward countries without full capitalist development.

In the political field the problem was no less fundamental or acute. The principal one related to the possible path by which Socialism would be achieved, that of peaceful change or forcible revolution. Inseparable from this was the attitude to be adopted to the national movement. Reduced to its essentials, this meant support either for the broad national movement or only for the programmes of the Socialist and Labour parties, where they existed.

The Paris Congress declared that "the organised proletariat should utilise all means at its disposal to combat colonial expansion of capitalism." Further, "wherever economic conditions render it possible Socialist parties should be formed in the colonies which should maintain contact with those of the ruling country." It is to be noted that here support is extended only to the Socialist Parties whose final emergence, as the resolution admitted, depended upon economic conditions.

About political freedom itself there were two views. On the one hand, there was the extreme Left position of Kautsky, according to whom only a Socialist Revolution would be able to realise the objective. However, he himself was baffled by the processes involved in the Socialist Revolution of which the liberation movements in the colonies were to be a part. In the end he declared : "The idea of the emancipation of the colonies is a sort of border idea which shows us the course to be followed but is not a practical proposition for the immediate application of which we must work." On the other hand,

was the position of the Paris Resolution that this was to be done "through enlightenment and the example of modern culture and civilisation," i.e., by a gradual improvement brought into being through general administrative reforms. This latter was the policy of the early Fabians too.¹ They sought not to defeat but to socialise the colonial and international policy of the British Empire. In India they stood for a Liberal policy : providing opportunities for education, Indianisation of the higher grades of Civil Services, developing germs of self-government under the guidance of the British Raj and allocating funds for studying and remedying industrial and social evils. Thus Cole and Postgate say of the Fabians : "Many of the Fabians, especially Bernard Shaw, were not without a touch of the imperialist spirit. Shaw, for example, intensely disliked small nations and backward people as obstacles to the onward march of civilisation, and was inclined to regard the British Empire as a potentially civilising force."²

Socialists like Mr. J. Keir Hardie and Mrs. Annie Besant found themselves in no less state of bewilderment at the situation. Mr. Hardie visited India in 1907, a period of nationalist turmoil following the partition of Bengal in 1905. Though his visit was a personal one, in his own words, he had "received a commission from the Labour Party to convey fraternal greetings to any kindred organisation I might meet on my travels."³ But he felt himself 'in the position of a physician who is called in to deal with a malady he does not understand.'⁴ He showed the same vacillating dualism as the other socialists in the West. On the one hand, he stressed the necessity of unity and self-help and promised Labour Party's support for self-government on colonial model;

1. Bernard Shaw, ed. *Fabianism and the Empire: Manifesto by the Fabian Society*, (1900).
2. Cole & Postgate: *The British Common People*, p. 377.
3. *All about Mr. J. Keir Hardie in India, Madras, 1907*, p. 10.
4. *Ibid*, p. 43.

on the other, he maintained that socialism aimed at putting into practice the Christian doctrine of Universal Brotherhood. But there was nothing novel in this appeal to attract the nationalists in India, or to convert them to Socialism.

Mrs. Annie Besant, one of the co-authors of the Fabian Essays, came to India, and became one of the foremost Home Rule League agitationists. She maintained that though there was nothing like Modern Socialism in India, yet according to her, there had been in India 'a spirit of socialism and a past that had laid a clear and definite foundation on which the edifice of socialism can very well be built.'¹ She pleaded for reverting back to the old principles and to the self-governing village republics. While in India the contributions of Mrs. Besant were not so much to socialism as to Indian nationalism and to the nationalist movement, though under her leadership a few Home Rule League agitationists in Madras and Bengal worked among workers, B. P. Wadia being one among them. Another British Labour leader to visit India during this period as a 'messenger of goodwill' was Mr. Mc Donald who later rose to be British Prime Minister.

However, the growing contacts between a few Indians and the Socialist and Labour elements in England and elsewhere were increasingly giving stimulus to the idea for organising labour on the trade union lines. In 1911, a systematic effort was made in London to draw the attention of the prominent trade union leaders to the question of assisting the Indian Labour to organise on trade union lines, for mutual protection of Indian as well as the British labour. Between 1912 and 1915 many Indians in England, being influenced by Labour work there, took various opportunities to arouse the interest of the leaders of public opinion in India on mass rights

1. *A Besant: Socialism in India (A lecture before Fabian Society, London), 1920.*

and labour organisations. In 1916 was founded in London a joint body of the Indian and British trade unionists and Socialists in the form of the Workers' Welfare League of India whose function it was to maintain a close working connection between the workers of India and Britain. Among its founders was Arthur Field. The constitution of the League provided that it should work independently of all political aims or movements and that it would "advocate the institution in India of provision for welfare of the working population, equivalent to, if not identical with, that granted to the working people in Great Britain, and to propagate among the democratic bodies of Great Britain that the orientals have the same claim to human rights as occidentals, including the right to organise and form trade unions."¹ The object was to press British democratic bodies for their support of various efforts to enable Indian workers' welfare such as reduction of hours of work, raising the age of child-labour, etc. The activities of the League were typified by the sending of trained people to India to organise trade unions, holding periodical conferences, circularising among the British clergymen, a large number of whom professed sympathy for Indian labour, securing and sending financial and other help to the Indian workers during labour troubles. Among the prominent leaders of the League since its inception were : K. S. Bhatt, J. E. Potter-Wilson, K. Sheildrake, Saklatvala and C. P. Dutt. As will be seen later on, the League became very active after the World War I. It took every opportunity to further interests of Indian workers, and exert influence upon the British working class. The League claimed that the first representation to British authorities made by the British Trade Unions on behalf of the Indian workers, and the first collection of contributions on behalf of the

1. K. S. Bhatt: *The Workers' Welfare League of India, in Labour Monthly, London, December, 1931.*

Indian workers, were both due to the League's initiative.¹ Though not a communist body in the beginning, in the twenties its policies and programmes bore communist orientations.

Speaking of international socialism and India mention may also be made of Mme Cama and Krishna Varma, both of whom called themselves socialists. They used to attend Socialist International Congress which denounced militarism and passed anti-war resolutions. Following the appearances of these Asians at the Congresses the Labour and Social-Democratic parties in the West started evincing interest in the colonies and their problems.

Conclusion

Though there was no Leftism in India before the World War One, yet all through the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th far-reaching changes were taking place in the social, economic, political, cultural and intellectual fields, which served to prepare the ground for the emergence of socialism. The social and industrial revolutions, the protest movements of peasants and workers, organisations for workers by philanthropic-minded individuals, the various reform movements, all aimed at some sort of reform, readjustment and reconstruction of the Indian society, and in that respect they are to be regarded as forerunners of the Leftist movements in India.

1. *The Workers' Welfare League of India, Tenth Annual Report, London, 1928.*

CHAPTER TWO

Early Beginnings, 1918—February, 1922.

This period marking the embryonic birth of Leftism in its Communist variant, covers the momentous years between 1918 and February, 1922 when Mahatma Gandhi called off the Satyagraha (the non-cooperation movement) after the Chauri Chaura incident. The Left-Wing Movement, in the proper sense of the term, started in India only after the World War One. The situation in post-war India was marked by a number of new and important features which combined to produce an atmosphere favourable to the origin of Leftism. Of these new features some were a direct consequence of the impact of War and the conditions created by it; others arose from the political impact that followed from the Russian Revolution of 1917; yet others can be traced to the stimulus of the British Labour Party, and the inspirations of its ideals being carried over into India; and finally we should mention the experiences born out of the swift political developments in post-war years and the mass nationalist movements launched by the Indian National Congress under the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

The New Situation after War

In the Industrial field the exigencies of War necessitated a modification of the previous hesitant policy towards industrialisation, leading to the growth of some native industries during War.¹ But this growth of industries proceeded hand in hand with the massing of

1. Govt. Annual Report: *Moral and Material Progress of India, 1921*, p. 114. The first proclamation of the new policy was made by Viceroy Lord Hardinge in 1915. The Industrial Commission of 1916 was appointed in pursuance of this policy.

workers in the industrial towns and the worsening of their conditions of life and work, which even in normal days had been far from satisfactory. The prices of essential commodities rose markedly, but there was no corresponding rise in wages, and the real wages of workers went down. While fantastic profits were being made by employers, there was no improvement in the conditions of workers, and with inflationary tendencies all around, they were passing through precarious days.¹

As the burdens of war-measures began to be felt, restiveness among the workers grew in an increasing manner. The demands for higher wages, dearness allowance and shorter hours of work began to figure prominently from 1917 onwards, and the immediate post-war years brought a crop of spontaneous protests and strikes. A great strike movement, unknown before, overtook the country. This strike wave began in 1918 and swept the country throughout 1919 and 1920. It was overwhelming in intensity. An epidemic of strike paralysed the whole industrial organisation. Dr. Das writes, "Some conception of the intensity and extensity of strikes of this period may be had from the following data : November 24 to December 2, 1919, Woollen Mills, Cawnpur, 17,000 men out; December 7, 1919 to January 9, 1920, Railway workers Jamalpur, 16,000 men out; January 9 to 18, 1920, Jute Mills, Calcutta, 35,000 men out; January 2 to February 3, General Strike, Bombay, 2,00,000 men out; January 31, British India Navigation Co., 10,000 men out; January 26 to February 16, Mill Workers, Sholapur, 16,000 men out; February 2 to 16, Indian Marine dock workers, 20,000 men out; February 24 to March 29, Tata Iron and Steel workers, 40,000 men out; March 9, Mill workers, Bombay, 60,000 men out; March 20 to 26, Mill workers, Madras, 17,000 men out;

1. B. Shiva Rao: *The Industrial Worker in India*, pp. 18-19. During the closing years of war prices rose in such unprecedented manner that there were fears of riots in some urban areas.

May 1920, Mill workers, Ahmedabad, 25,000 men out.”¹ Among the demands were higher pay, lesser hours of work etc. In 1920 the workers of Bombay demanded 10 hour’s day. The Government had to accede to this demand and the law was enacted in 1922.

To be sure, these strikes were not inspired by any ideology much less that of Socialism. They were a consequence of the rapidly deteriorating economic position of the workers. As the Royal Commission on Indian Labour (1928) put it : “The great outbreak of the strike after the War had been due to obvious economic causes : a rise in wage level was overdue and the workers awoke to the disabilities from which they suffered in respect of long hours and other matters.”²

But there were obvious differences between these strikes and those of the pre-War years. The latter had been small in number, sporadic, and less intense, with no real purpose to guide them; they occurred locally and in a disconnected manner, leaving no ripples behind them.³ These post-war strikes, on the contrary, though often spontaneous, were not wholly blind but were based on demands for higher wages, dearness allowance, bonus and shorter hours of work. For the first time in the Indian labour history there was a distinctly all-India character to these strikes. A strike in one industry gave rise to a wave of strikes in other industries; often a strike in one place was a signal for strike in other places. This was an indication of the growing, weak though it was, class-solidarity and class-consciousness among the workers—not yet, however, a socialistic consciousness.

1. R. K. Das: *Labour Movement in India*, p. 36.

2. Report of the Royal Commission on Indian Labour, p. 151.

3. B. Shiva Rao, *opt. cit.*, p. 13. About these pre-war strikes he writes: “They aroused no great interest among the class of politicians who led the political movement of those days, and industrial disputes, when they occurred, were regarded with almost complete apathy by those not immediately concerned with them”.

This new consciousness had partly been born out of the experiences of the war years when everybody, from the manager in the factory to the highest Government officials, talked and lectured on the importance of labour and labourers. This generated in the worker a consciousness that, after all, he was not a 'neglected commodity', the untouchable 'coolie', but was of importance to the well-being of society. Steeped in ignorance and overwhelmed by the authoritarian taboos of caste and other sectarian creeds, this consciousness, howsoever vague, was a factor of significance for the Indian worker. From this, however, it should not be hastily inferred that this realization was uniform affecting all the workers or that it ever embraced them all or even a majority.

Almost a by-product of this new atmosphere, along with other factors to be noted shortly, was the evincing of interest in labour and labour problems by some intellectuals and leaders of thought who had so far neither cared for them nor realized their importance. As already indicated, the intellectuals, except for a handful of philanthropic-minded individuals, had kept aloof from the working people. As we shall see later, many factors served to draw the intellectuals close to the labour movement, particularly the development of the political mass movement, the influence of the British Labour Party and the impact of the Russian Revolution.

The outlook of the peasantry which constituted overwhelming majority of population was not unaffected by the War. The crippling measures of recruitment, the raising of loans, higher taxes, rise in the prices of essential commodities etc. had had a shattering effect upon peasant economy. The slump in the prices of agricultural products after War added to their difficulties and served to deepen their discontent. As with the workers, the post-war years witnessed a growing restiveness among broad strata of peasantry in widely separate regions of the country.

Besides economic causes other factors served to promote this changing outlook of the peasants and workers. One was the exploding of the myth of invulnerability of the 'white-sahib'—a realization brought home by the Indian soldiers returning from the war. These soldiers, who hail mostly from the rank of the peasants, had fought shoulder to shoulder with Europeans on various fronts and they brought home to the villages the solid but hitherto unbelievable truth that the 'white-sahib' after all was a man like him. It is difficult to-day to imagine or to conceive the effect that this had, but there is no doubt that, linked with the prevailing economic discontent, it marked the genesis of that challenging outlook which later developed into a political mass movement under Gandhi. B. Shiva Rao is not wide of the mark when he writes, "Before the War the superiority of the whiteman was unquestioned and unquestionable. But the war almost completely destroyed that notion; a sense of equality came almost fiercely into prominence. There was the thrill of a new experience for the humble worker in a factory, accustomed to be docile and bear harsh treatment and kicks without a protest, to register a complaint against his European superior in a law court for assault. That was really the biggest change brought about by the war and this psychological factor made itself felt in every detail of life."¹

The soldiers also brought home the knowledge of sharp contrast between the life of the European peasants and the Indian peasantry. They had seen a new life, a new world, and had had a new conception of humanity which, however, was in utter contradistinction to the life to which they again returned after demobilisation. It is, therefore, not surprising that the peasant movement was most prominent in those areas like the Punjab, the U.P. and Gujarat from which the soldiers hailed. The soldiers had also grievances against rapid and unprospective demobilization.

1. B. Shiva Rao: *Opt. Cit.* p. 18-19.

To add to the disquietude of the masses were crop failures and epidemics like cholera and influenza which took a heavy toll of life, i.e. nearly twelve millions in a comparatively brief period. While these factors created a background of unrest there took place other developments that had far bigger hand in the new transformation of the situation. The first was the launching of the non-violent Non-co-operation movement towards the end of 1920, the first political mass movement in India. *Non-Co-operation, the role of Mahatma Gandhi and the origin of the Left-Wing*

The post-war years witnessed a hurricane of developments in the general political situation in the country. The nationalist movement, which had been dormant during war, took an increasingly challenging attitude and assumed a mass character. The introduction of these new features was marked by the rise of the Gandhian leadership and the launching of the Non-violent Non-Co-operation.¹

The role of Mahatma Gandhi consisted in the fact that he realized the revolutionary character of the whole situation, which, as he saw it, could be solved neither by mere constitutional agitation nor by terrorist methods. His significant role consisted in the fact that to meet the demands of the new situation he evolved a suitable method of direct action. His particular contribution to Indian politics at the time lay in his conception of non-violent resistance and in his insistence upon mass action and mass contact. His epoch-making service was to bring

1. Space permits us only to touch on these important developments in the general political scene, with special reference to the role of Mahatma Gandhi. While dealing with them only in brief it is necessary to stress the importance of these developments as the background against which an appraisal of the origin of the Left-Wing movements has to be made. For detailed account see, P. Sitaramayya: *History of Indian National Congress*; V. Raghuvanshy: *Indian Nationalist Movement and Thought*; A. R. Desai: *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*; Dr. Satyapal: *Sixty Years of the Congress*; D. G. Tendulkar: *The Mahatma, Vol. II.*

public affairs into villages. This approach was in marked contrast to the old politics of both the Moderates and the Extremists, though he never completely broke off from these traditions. The new class of urban-minded intelligentsia not only neglected village but even detested villagers and village-life, with the result that a definite hiatus had grown between this class and the masses of people. The Mahatma cried a halt to this abhorrent attitude.

True, the Gandhian conception of mass-action was not what is ordinarily understood by this term. According to Gandhi, mass-action combined with non-violence, required for its full implementation that the people should be ethically and spiritually prepared for it and to this end he prescribed many conditions for a Satyagrahi or Satyagrah campaign, thereby qualifying mass-action with moral and spiritual considerations, though in practice such pre-conditions could not be worked out so smoothly. The Mahatma himself started his political life in India with work among the Champaran peasants where he started Satyagraha against the indigo planters in 1917 and later lent his support to the peasant Satyagraha in Kheda and Bardoli regions of Gujarat. His activities were not limited to the peasantry. In March, 1918 he led the Ahmedabad Labour Satyagraha. In February, 1920 he inaugurated the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Union based on Gandhian principles of labour organisation. These campaigns were undoubtedly limited to the immediate grievances of the peasantry and were not directed against the agrarian system as such but Gandhi's role lay in the fact that he presented the peasants' grievances not to be petitioned for as matters of grace as hitherto conceived but as concessions to the rights of peasants, though he, no doubt, clothed these rights under ethical and religious garbs and advocated that it was fulfilling one's Dharma (religion or duty) to fight against injustice and to assert one's rights. While he has been criticised by the Leftists for bringing in these ethico-religious considerations into socio-economic realm,

his method of presenting the problem was one which the peasants could readily understand. He lived the simple life of the Indian peasant, dressed like him, and talked in the language and through the idioms the peasant readily understood. Throughout he kept his feet firmly rooted in the soil. Herein lay the source of strength of the Mahatma, and his unquestioned and unparalleled, patriarchal leadership of the national movement; a fact which often baffled the Leftists.

Indeed from this period dates the Modern Peasant Movement in India. Of course, in this not only Mahatma Gandhi but the World War One and its aftermath, the new political situation, the rapidly deteriorating economic condition as also the impact of the Russian Revolution had a contributing effect. As indicated earlier, the World War One affected the peasant economically and in many parts of the country there were movements to secure a revision of ejectment laws, against enhancement of rent, abolition of illegal exaction and the system of forced labour.

Thus the Non-Co-operation Movement launched by the Indian National Congress under Gandhian leadership was a tremendous concentration of the masses of the population into a single movement. For the first time in the modern Indian history the masses of peasants—and to a lesser extent the industrial working class—were drawn into a political movement.

To begin with the peasants were drawn to the Non-Co-operation on their own economic grievances but two factors which were by-products of Non-Co-operation later led the peasants, and to a lesser extent the labourers, to identify themselves with this movement, though the two movements, the non-co-operation and the agrarian, were quite separate. The agrarian movement continued, though in an abated form, even after the Non-Co-operation was suspended. These two factors were: (1) the growth of a spirit of revolt and defiance which the Non-Co-operation generated; and (2) a call for the 'no tax campaign' made

by the Indian National Congress at its Nagpur session in December, 1920. Speaking about this new atmosphere P. Sitaramayya says : "A spirit of resistance to authority was the dominant factor of public life and people practised this in different parts of the country in relation to the conditions of life around them and the local and civic problems that confronted them."¹ Tendulkar continues in the same vein : "Many of the new recruits who worked for the Congress lived in a kind of intoxication. The feeling of fear, oppression and frustration completely disappeared. Even in remote villages the people talked of the Congress and Swaraj."²

Amidst this all-pervading atmosphere of restlessness and defiance and yearning towards the vague ideal of Swaraj came the important session of the Indian National Congress held at Nagpur in December, 1920, which had great importance for the subsequent activities of the National Congress. The aim of the Congress was changed from colonial self-government within the Empire to the attainment of Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means. The Congress solicited the co-operation of peasantry, students, youth and labour in the noble task of participation in the national movement, and with this end in view it adopted resolutions on labour and peasants. The resolution on labour expressed support for workers, approved their struggle for lawful rights through trade unions and condemned the policy of persecuting workers. The resolution on peasants condemned British Imperialist policy and welcomed the fact that more and more Kisans (peasants) were joining anti-Government struggle and were taking part in the boycott movement. To crown this all came the call of the Congress for a no-tax campaign. The relevant resolution was to the effect that "the refusal to pay taxes should be put in force at a time to be determined by either the Indian National Congress or the A.I.C.C."³

1. See, P. Sitaramayya : *History of Congress*, p. 369.

2. D. G. Tendulkar : *Mahatma*, Vol. II. p. 46.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

True, the Congress never meant this no-tax campaign to be general and to be undertaken simultaneously at all places, but only at select places and that also with the permission of the Congress, yet the common people refused to be restricted in their activities. The very fact that a call for revolt had come made peasants and workers in many places rise spontaneously against oppression even before this no-tax campaign could be officially inaugurated.

In fact even before this Congress the peasants undertook various forms of mass action in separate regions of the country for redress of their grievances. In this, the Moplah uprisings in Malabar apart, the unity of the Hindu and Muslim masses enthusiastically engendered in the wake of the mingling, earlier, of the Khilafat and the non-co-operation had an added significance. The people interpreted the Khilafat (from Urdu *Khilaf*, meaning against) as opposition to the Government.

The peasants interpreted the political struggle for Swaraj in terms of a struggle against the heavy land tax. Swaraj became to them an all-embracing concept to cover everything. A rumour spread from village to village that Gandhi Raj had come and it was no longer necessary to pay taxes.

The advance of the movement, thus, was demonstrated not only in the enthusiastic development of the Khilafat and the non-co-operation, but in the accompanying rising forms of mass action by peasants and workers. There were no tax campaigns in various parts of the country, notably in Midnapore district in Bengal, Guntur district in Andhra and in Gujarat. In the Kaira district in Gujarat there was a no-tax campaign in 1918-19 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Vallabh Bhai Patel. The Kheda Satyagraha was another note-worthy development in Gujarat. In Bardoli region of Gujarat there was a no-tax campaign in 1921-22. The Akali movement against rich Mahants and the Ghadar were

the notable developments in the Punjab.¹ The Assam-Bengal Railway strike was coupled with political strikes of workers against the Rowlatt Act. Though unconnected with the non-co-operation there were the Moplah uprisings in Malabar (now Kerala). Though it assumed a communal colour, but the basic discontent, undoubtedly, was agrarian in nature.

The peasant movement was particularly strong in U.P. where it took the form of 'Eka Andolan' against taluqdars and bureaucracy, and standing for one big anti-landlord union. There were two types of Eka Sabhas; one dealing solely with economic problem, the other prompted also by political aims. The movement in U.P. was marked by the solidarity that it displayed, its agrarian character and by its non-communal nature. It was also in U.P. that as early as 1918, a Kisan Sabha (peasant organisation) was formed in Allahabad to meet the situation arising out of mass evictions. In the following years the activities of the Kisan Sabhas grew in momentum.

At this stage one Ramchandra played a prominent role so far as the peasant movement in U.P. was concerned. The peasants, in the main, had the following demands: (a) restriction on evictions, (b) restriction on forced labour, (c) stopping of fines, and stopping illegal exactions. Though there were a number of uprisings and firings by the police against these, but the movement on the whole remained peaceful and to realize their aims the peasants took vows to remain peaceful, not to pay illegal exactions,

1. *Mahants are the rich religious landlords. There was a movement in the Punjab for a redistribution of land belonging to the Mahants. It is noteworthy that the movement took place in the Punjab where a new consciousness and new stirrings had been brought by the soldiers. Though the movement later assumed a religious garb but its basically agrarian character can't be underrated. The Ghadar movement in its essentials was a manifestation of agrarian unrest. Some later leftists in India and abroad were recruits from Ghadar.*

not to pay *nazarana*, non-acquiescence in forced labour, refusal of evicted land etc. Gradually the movement spread to other parts of U.P. and by 1921 became sufficiently widespread. Some of the younger Congress leaders in U.P. like Jawaharlal Nehru, Narendra Dev etc. were drawn to the masses due to their contact with the peasants and their movements at the time.

Although the Congress thus broadly sympathised with the demands of the peasants, but it did not espouse their class demands. As Narendra Dev, a keen participant in the drama, observes : "The Congress was not then willing to fight for the economic demands of the Kisans, though in its struggle the Congress assuredly desired the co-operation of the Kisans."¹

By the time of the Ahmedabad Congress (December, 1921), it was apparent that a retreat in respect of non-co-operation had begun, and with that the interest of the Congress as such in the peasant movement also receded. But the peasant movement continued, partly under the leadership of individual Congressmen but also independently.

The importance of the non-co-operation under Gandhian leadership consists in the fact that it gave recognition to the discontent that was brewing and created that emotional and intellectual climate of fearlessness, defiance and revolt which became an indirect factor in the origin of the Left Wing movements proper. Its role can be seen in retrospect as creating the appropriate psychological pre-conditions under which labour and socialist ideals of the West could be made receptive.

But once that was done some of the young intellectuals could no longer remain within the confines of Gandhism. They did not accept the Gandhian solution of the problems of the masses. Some were attracted towards the ideals of the Labour Movements in the West, especially those of the British Labour Movement and

1. *Narendra Dev : Opt. Cit. p. 60.*

they favoured their adoption by the Indian Labour Movement. With this end in mind they turned towards labour movement and their endeavour, assisted by other favourable factors, resulted in the formation of the All India Trade Union Congress in October, 1920. Some of these young people, while still co-operating with the Gandhian movement, were thinking of alternative methods. Ready at hand came the Russian Revolution to which they were attracted, though their motives at the outset were almost entirely nationalistic. The story of these assimilations is to a large extent the story of the origin of the Left Wing movement in India and we shall now turn to a detailed examination of how this took place.

The Impact of the Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution of 1917 played a great part in the origin of socialist movements not only in India, but all over Asia. The Revolution was fought on the slogan of internationalism, racial equality and self-determination for all nationalities. So far as India was concerned, these ideals were being pronounced at a time when there was a shattering of faith in the principles of Victorian Liberalism, under whose fountain the nationalists had once drunk so deep and with such pride and jubilation. As a climax to the impact of this new influence came the Declaration of Nationalities under joint names of Lenin and Stalin, which not only repudiated the former Czarist Empire but enunciated new principles of national self-determination.¹ As K. M. Pannikar remarks, "This was indeed an explosive statement and all the nations of Asia, struggling for freedom, heard it with a new hope."² The Revolution in Russia in its beginning was regarded in India as a triumph over despotism and it gave impetus to Indian political aspirations.

Another effect of the Russian Revolution—and far more important from our point of view—was to under-

1. I am grateful to Mr. A. Rothstein for supplying me a copy of the same.

2. K. M. Pannikar: *Asia and Western Dominance*, p. 250.

mine the intellectual monopoly so far exercised by the West upon the mind of Asia. Henceforward came a rival ideology, a rival intellectual attraction, to which the intelligentsia was prone to turn, specially during moments of intellectual unrest.

The social, economic and political ideals of the Revolution were not only responsible for a change in the character of Nationalism itself, which had so far been mainly political, but they also held attractions for some intellectuals. The Revolution almost contagiously forced a consideration of socio-economic contents of nationalism. As will be shown presently, it was from among the early sympathisers with the ideals of the Revolution that the communist movement in India began, whether as a left-wing inside the Indian National Congress, or as a left-wing inside the All India Trade Union Congress or as youth movements and independent groups. Undoubtedly, the part played by the Revolution in the origin and development of left-wing movements and ideas is similar to the part played by the victory of Japan over Czarist Russia in 1905, so far as the development of Asian nationalism in its new integral form was concerned. This was partly because the Russian communists took direct interest in the initiation of such movements. This is one reason why in most Asian countries the first to emerge were the communist groups; socialist and social-democratic groups originated much later.

Influence of the British Labour Movement

Simultaneously with the ideas of the Russian Revolution came the ideals of the British Labour. The long-standing ignorance concerning Trade Unionism broke down due to increasing contact with labour movements abroad during the War. In particular the aims and objects of the British Labour Movement influenced Indian Labour. This happened in two ways. During war, to enlist the support of Indian workers, the news of organisations and sacrifices of workers in Great Britain

were widely made known by the officials in India. This created an interest in labour organisations and in the principles on which these organisations were based. The ideals of the British Labour also attracted a few intellectuals who had been interested in social and labour work. Some of them, like Lajpat Rai, N. M. Joshi, R. R. Bakhale, etc. took prominent part in founding the All India Trade Union Congress in 1920.

A marked consequence of the Russian Revolution was the dichotomic division of the International Socialist Movement. This was one of the reasons why the British Labour Party now started evincing interest in the labour problems in India, although during the pre-war years, the Party as such was not interested in these problems. But the new platform of the Party called the 'Labour and the New Social Order' (1918) defined the Labour policy towards colonies and spoke of the desire to maintain most intimate relationship with the Labour Parties overseas. The document read : "With regard to that great commonwealth of all races, all colours, all religions and all degree of civilisation, that we call British Empire, the Labour Party stands for its maintenance and its progressive development on the lines of Local Autonomy, and Home Rule all round, the fullest respects for the rights of each people, whatever its colour, to all the Democratic self-governments of which it is capable."

The Labour Party now wanted Indian labour to organise on the same principles as had been adopted in Britain, and favoured the formation not only of Trade Unions but also of an Indian Labour Party. It would have liked the Indian working class to organise itself on independent class basis, starting with the movement for amelioration of immediate economic grievances through peaceful, constitutional means. For this purpose it sent Col. Wedgewood and Ben Spoor to attend the first Congress of the A.I.T.U.C. in 1920. We shall now turn to a description of this consummation.

Birth of the All India Trade Union Congress.

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, one of the consequences of War had been the worsening of the conditions of life and work of Indian labour, which found expression in the great strike-waves encompassing the entire country. A new consciousness among the labouring classes had arisen, giving rise to new ideals and new aspirations and the growth of a spirit of defiance and restlessness. It was this period of militancy which marked the emergence of real trade unions and of the modern Labour Movement in India. Many of them were essentially strike committees, springing up in the conditions of an immediate struggle but lacking in staying power. Many, however, succeeded in establishing themselves as trade unions and strengthened their positions. Among those the first to be noted is the union of the Wapers in Ahmedabad Cotton Mills started in 1917, though its basis of organisation was very weak. The first systematic attempt at trade union organisation, with regular membership and dues, was made by B. P. Wadia, when on April 27, 1918, he formed the Madras Labour Union among the textile workers of the Mills of Coolai, Madras. Its demands were : (a) mid-day recess of 40 minutes, (b) wage increase by 25 per cent, (c) better treatment to workers by European officers, (d) payment of wages on the 7th of the month etc. Subsequently, trade unions were formed in other important industrial centres like Bombay, Calcutta, Cawnpore, Ahmedabad etc. and in a short time there was hardly any industry in India which could not claim some form of organisation. Among some noteworthy unions formed during this period were : Indian Seaman's Union (1918) ; G. I. P. Railwaymen's Union (1919) ; Ahmedabad Textile Workers' Union (1920) ; N.W. Railway Employees' Union (1920) ; Indian Colliery Employees Association (1920) ; Jamshed-

pur Labour Association (1920); B.N.W. Railway Union, B.B.C.I. Railway Union etc.¹

The crowning effect of them all was the formation, in 1920, of the All India Trade Union Congress, which held its first session in Bombay in October, 1920 under the presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai. There were various factors which prompted this consummation, as well as the rapid growth of the trade unions. Some of them have already been noted: the new consciousness among the workers, their pronounced restlessness coupled with new ideals and aspirations; economic discontent which resulted in strikes, strike committees and trade unions in that order; the fast developing political unrest which brought forward willing political leaders to assist in the development of the trade unions; the hopes of a new social order awakened by the Russian Revolution; and the ideals of the British Labour Movement.

But what really provoked the establishment of the A.I.T.U.C. was the International Labour Organisation, with its provision for representation of labour to be nominated by Governments concerned on the recommendations of Labour Organisations. It was this stipulation which, above all, imposed the necessity of a Central Labour Organisation which could make recommendations with one voice through its representative. As Bakhale says: "The working class in India did not fail to realize the importance of the right that was bestowed on them and the harm that would be done if they did not organise themselves in order to exercise that right."² Indeed the idea of convening an All-India Congress of the Trade Unions arose out of a protest meeting of Bombay workers against the nomination by the Government of N. M. Joshi as the workers' representative on 10th July, 1920.³

1. R. K. Das: *Labour Movement in India*, p. 30-40; I.L.O. Report: *Industrial Labour in India*, p. 123.
2. R. R. Bakhale: *Directory of Trade Unions*, p. 1.
3. A.I.T.U.C., 1920, p. 1.

Originating under such a humble beginning the A.I.T.U.C. did not set before itself the realization of any grandiose task. Its declared aim, one of the shortest in the history of any such organisation, was "to coordinate the activities of all labour organizations in all trades and in all Provinces in India and generally to further the interests of Indian labour in matters social, political and economic."¹ It was also meant to provide a meeting ground for those engaged in the organization of workers in India, and a platform for enunciation of labour policy. It was also considered to be a link between trade unionism in India and the trade union and labour movements elsewhere. The Congress was a confederation comprising unions of all categories in India. In 1920 about 60 unions were affiliated to the Central body, and about 62 expressed their intention of supporting it.

While no homogeneous aims and ideals among its founders can be detected, one common denominator seems to have been the intention to build a labour movement after the English model. Hence the adoption of the name Trade Union Congress. In fact many of the founders of the Congress had come in contact with the British Labour Party and the British Trade Union Congress, were appreciative of their work and wanted Indian labour to work on similar pattern.² The Congress received messages from G. Lansbury, and from British and Irish Labour.

Among the prominent leaders of the Congress were : W. P. Wadia, Joseph Baptista, Lala Lajpat Rai, Dewan Chamanlal, N. M. Joshi and V. V. Giri. Also present at the annual meeting were : Annie Besant, Jinnah, Motilal Nehru, V. I. Patel, S. A. Brelvi, Narimann and V. M. Pavar. Lal and Pavar were the originators of the idea of the Congress. B. P. Wadia, a staunch theosophist, was an adherent of Annie Besant. It was from Mrs.

1. Object, as declared in Draft Constitution and Rules: Report of the First A.I.T.U.C., p. 75.
2. M. N. Roy: Indian Labour and Post-War Reconstruction. p. 13. Indian Annual Register, 1921, p. 266.

Besant that Wadia got the main impetus to organise Indian Labour on European lines, particularly on the model of the British Labour Party. His centre of activity was Madras. Indeed certain workers of the Home Rule League worked among the workers in Bengal and Madras. It has already been noted how this culminated in the formation of the first systematic trade union in India. Wadia was of the opinion that the economic aim of Indian labour should be not only to secure higher wages but also the ultimate destruction of wage slavery. According to him the Indian Labour movement was "too materialistic and lacks a soul." He, therefore, wanted Indian labour to look at problems from a "spiritualistic point of view."¹

In a way the inspiration to Wadia for labour work came from political motives. He wrote at the time, "It is very necessary to recognise the labour movement as an integral part of the national movement, the latter will not succeed in the right direction of democracy if the Indian working classes are not enabled to organise their forces and come into their own."² Thus, to Wadia organising labour was in part a process of preparing workers to take effective part in any democratic state, which, indeed, was his ultimate ideal. Unless this was done, he believed, freedom would mean "transferring the power of the bureaucracy from foreign to native hands."³ This would be a denial of democracy. Wadia was a moderate labour leader. He wanted to fashion the Indian Labour Movement on the lines of the British Trade Unions. The British labour leaders were sympathetic to Wadia and men like him. When he was arrested in 1918, the British Labour Party took up his case with the Secretary of State for India and was able to secure his release.

Mr. Joseph Baptista, Chairman of the Reception Committee of the First Congress, and President of the

1. *Speech of W. P. Wadia to Serampur Labourers, 13th July, 1918.*

2. *Quoted by B. Shiva Rao in Industrial Labour in India, p. 15.*

3. *Ibid, p. 15.*

second session of the A.I.T.U.C., was influenced by the Independent Labour Party of Great Britain and sought to introduce Fabian Socialism to India. In his Presidential address he said, "the political policy of the Congress must steer clear of the extreme individualism and Bolshevism and follow the golden path of Fabian Socialism."

Like Wadia, he believed in the spiritual task of Indian Labour. As Chairman of the Reception Committee of the First Congress he opined: "the supreme need of the moment is really for some light from the East to illumine the darkness of the West; for the humanising spiritualism of the East, to chasten the brutalising materialism of the West."¹ How was this ideal to be achieved? It was too simple for Baptista: by the power and principles of organised labour in India.² But how the "power and principles of organised labour" was to be converted into an organ of spiritualism was never made clear by him.

It is a great paradox in the attitude of Baptista and men like him that while taking inspiration from and endeavouring to organise Indian Labour on principles of Trade Unionism borrowed from the West, they at the same time detested and decried those very principles as "satanic" and "materialistic" and "brutalising". It is doubtful whether they themselves saw the contradiction involved in their attitude.

However, this vision of 'spiritualism' did colour his outlook on society, state, labour and capital. Good society was the ideal he aimed at, and regarded state as an instrument prerequisite for that end.³ He admitted that no Government in theory denied this but it had 'never been enforced in practice by the governing classes.'⁴

The state must be solicitous of workers' welfare. Indeed, state's help was essential for this but much could

1. *Report of the First Session of A.I.T.U.C.*, p. 17.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

3. *His address to First A.I.T.U.C. Report*, p. 8.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

also be done by the power of trade unions, strikes and boycotts.

He regarded Labour and Capital as co-partners engaged in promoting the well-being of society. His objection to the present society lay in the domination of capital over labour. He also objected to it because the capitalists instead of working on spiritualistic principles act on the materialistic principle of 'buying labour and paying for it according to the eternal and infernal law of demand and supply'. Till this was eradicated and supplanted by the higher idea of partnership, the well-being of working class can never be secured and, consequently, society will rest on shaky foundation, because the "well-being of society depends upon the well-being of workers."¹

He advocated the establishment of a Ministry of Labour. He wanted the A.I.T.U.C. to develop into a national organ of labour, wherein the co-operatives, trade unions and socialistic movements would find representation. His ideas on outsiders in trade unions are noteworthy. Many at this stage considered it inevitable, though not desirable. Baptista, on the contrary, thought them to be 'desirable as they constituted an impartial element, and as they represented the consumers' interest in trade dispute.

Lala Lajpat Rai, V. V. Giri and Dewan Chamanlal were radical nationalists and were drawn to labour on nationalistic and philanthropic grounds. Rai was a staunch opponent of Communism and was favourably disposed to the ideals of the British Labour Party.² He was, indeed, the earliest advocate of an Indian Labour Party and was the founder-President of the party formed in 1925, and President during its short lease of life. Being sympathetic to the ideals of British Labour,

1. *Ibid.*

2. Lajpat Rai: *The Political Future of India, 1919*, p. 183. He dedicated this book to Col. Wedgewood, M.P.

he condemned the action of the Government of India in preventing access of the people of India to the socialistic and labour thought of the world.¹

His ideal was a democratic state but he believed that the growth of democratic political institutions in India must inevitably be followed by a movement for social democracy. He was of opinion that "we should adopt the aim of the British Labour Party as our own, start educating our people on these lines and formulate for them measures which will secure for them real freedom."²

He believed that this was one of the ways of checking the growth of Bolshevism on Indian soil. The other, and the more fundamental principle for him was to 'concede the rights to the different peoples of the earth now being bled and exploited.'³ A happy and contented self-governing India, he averred, would be 'the brightest spot in the British Commonwealth.'⁴

He seems to have come under the spell of the Russian Revolution also but he interpreted the Revolution as having for its foundation justice and self-determination for all peoples.⁵ This explains his inability to be drawn into the vortex of the communist movement, though he and M. N. Roy had confabulated together in the U.S.A., but later drew apart due to differences.

Rai's opposition to capital and capitalism was rather complex. There was, for example, the nationalistic reason : it is capitalism which produces the twin children of militarism and Imperialism.⁶ Capitalism had created havoc all over the world. India with its hoary civilisation, its mighty spiritualism, its great philosophy had not been left unaffected by that.⁷ Then all on a sudden this vision

1. *A.I.T.U.C. Report of the first session, p. 26.*

2. *Ibid.*, p. 203-4.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 205-6.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

6. *His Presidential speech to First A.I.T.U.C., Report, p. 18.*

7. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

of the 'mighty spiritualism' of India set forth the condemnation of the dying materialistic civilisation of Europe, its vicious and immoral social order based on injustice, tyranny, oppression and class rule. According to him "India will not be a party to any scheme which shall add to the powers of the capitalist and the landlord and will introduce and accentuate the evils of the expiring industrial civilisation into our beloved country."¹ For the same reason Marxism was to be condemned most vehemently, for the Marxists assert that 'every country must pass through the capitalist stage.'²

Rai suffered from the uncertainty of not being sure that this phase could be avoided in India. Perhaps it was inevitable.³ Here Rai's opposition to capitalism turned into opposition to 'foreign capitalism' which must be opposed in the common interests of workers all over the world, for the cause of workers is one and the same all over the world.⁴ He believed that the cause of the European proletariat was neither safe nor secure so long as there is cheap labour in China and India.⁵ Indian Labour, therefore, should not only solidify and defend the interests of Indian labour but should forge a link in the chain of international brotherhood.⁶

As regards native capitalism he, like Baptista, was of opinion that labour and capital were co-partners in a common endeavour, but his complaint was that the present capitalists didn't meet labour on equal grounds. It must be made worth the while of labour to co-operate with capital to advance and develop Indian Industries.⁷ Indian capital should not ignore the needs of labour.

1. Rai: *The Political Future of India*, p. 201.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

4. *Speech to First A.I.T.U.C.*, p. 18.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

6. *Indian Annual Register*, 1921, p. 253.

7. *Speech to First A.I.T.U.C.*, p. 20.

This, according to him, was the only way to avoid the evils of class struggle.¹

It was here that there arose the necessity for Indian labour to organise itself on national lines, with due regard to national interests in order to be able to negotiate with employers on equal terms.

N. M. Joshi is the last of the Moderates in Indian politics. He was born of a priestly family in 1879 near Bombay. He did priestly work for sometime, and worked as a paid volunteer in famine relief work in 1901. After graduation he was a teacher for eight years. In 1909 he joined the Servants of India Society. He had been Secretary of the Bombay Social Service League since 1911. Nehru praises him for trade union work but considers him as moderate and politically backward.² Even when the Indian National Congress was swayed under Gandhian leadership towards self-help and direct action, Joshi's faith in British sense of justice and fairplay did not suffer. He left the Congress in 1918. He still believed that a'll round promotion of Indian interests presupposed the political guidance of the British.³ In Gandhi's views he saw a lack of appreciation for scientific progress.

He carried the reforming zeal of the Moderates into the fold of labour and labour organisation. He believed that labour could win economic concessions without seemingly involved in the struggle for political rights. According to him labour should be neutral in struggle for national freedom which was best left to the politicians.

He came in contact with the British Labour leader Macdonald during the early years of the War when the latter visited India and in their conversations the ideals of an Indian Labour Party figured prominently, and

1. *Speech to A.I.T.U.C. Congress; and his Future of Indian Politics*, p. 204.
2. *Nehru: Autobiography*, p. 187.
3. *D. C. Home: N; M. Joshi*, in *Bharat Jyoti*, June 6, 1954.

while nothing immediately came out of it, Joshi, like Rai, stood out as one of the advocates of an Indian Labour Party.

In 1919 he was nominated to represent Indian Labour at the International Labour Conference then being held at Washington, and during this journey he came in contact with the British Communists, R. P. Dutt, Saklatvala, Arnot etc., and he also met American Communist Agnes Smedley; and they tried to influence him but he could not be converted.

Out of these welter of influences emerged what might be regarded as the pattern of the A.I.T.U.C. activities which continued for many years to come. The principle on which it was based was that the well-being of society depends upon the well-being of labour and that society is the common employer of Capital and Labour.¹ Consequently, labour and capital are not, or rather should not be, buyers and sellers but co-partners engaged in the well-being of society. As a co-partner the status of labour must be raised and placed on a footing of equality with capital and it must reap the full fruits of its toil. That had to be done primarily through the instrumentality of the state. It was for the state to fix the maximum wage for labour and the maximum profit for capital and all excess profits ought to be the benefit of labour.² Therefore, the attitude of labour to the state should be neither one of support nor that of opposition to the Government.³ Every effort of Government for the amelioration of labour's grievances was to be welcomed. But the Government was rather capitalistic in its sympathy and herein arose the necessity of organised labour to present its grievances before the Government.

1. *Manifesto of Labour Deputation of First A.I.T.U.C. to Bombay Governor, Report, p. 55.*
2. *Ibid., p. 55.*
3. *Presidential Address of Lajpat Rai to First A.I.T.U.C. Report, p.262.*

The object of a labour organisation was to develop both a sense of injustice concerning the position of labour and class consciousness among the workers, though the development of this class consciousness did not at all involve the adoption of the notion of class-struggle, on the contrary it meant simply an awareness of the interests of labour and the necessity of securing them. It was no intention of the A.I.T.U.C. either to originate or to intensify any conflict between capital and labour, on the contrary, the desire was to promote harmony between them.¹ It is to the ills that the labour was subjected that attention had to be drawn, and it must be done by a representation of labour. This desire found expression in a resolution that the law should be so changed as to recognise the right of labour to have a special representative by election on the legislative councils of the country.² But it is significant to note that no universal suffrage for labour was advocated or demanded; neither was any mention made as to the desirability of forming a party of labour.

In keeping with this attitude of political neutrality the A.I.T.U.C. kept itself out of the stream of nationalist agitations that swept the country in an unprecedented manner. It concerned itself mainly with the economic grievances of Indian labour but never officially allied itself with the political agitation of the Indian National Congress, although here and there some Unions were drawn into the movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. It was only to play to the sentiments of the nationalist leaders, who were present in large number at the Congress, that the Congress issued a Manifesto to the workers of India enjoining upon them to assert their rights and not to stand aloof from the stream of national life. It reminded them that there was nothing in their union membership to prevent them from joining the Indian

1. *Manifesto to Governor*, p. 54.

2. *Report*, p. 45.

National Congress. In fact, as already indicated, the Indian National Congress itself never wanted Indian labour as labour to dive headstrong into the Nationalist movement, but neither did it like the independent class organisations of workers. Regarding itself as a nationalist organisation par-excellence it apprehended that if the activities of the class organisations of peasants and workers were carried too far they might impair national unity and national movement so vital when the basic issue was struggle against imperialism. This is one of the points on which considerable controversy raised inside the National Congress in the thirties when a sizeable Left element within it made itself felt. That is one of the reasons why Co. Wedgewood's proposal for the creation of an Indian Labour Party at the first A.I.T.U.C. could not materialise,¹ though this Congress passed a resolution extending fraternal greetings to the British Trade Union Congress and to Col. Wedgewood, who was attending the Congress as a fraternal delegate from the British Labour Party. The President assured Mr. Wedgewood that they wanted to be friendly to the British Labour and to remain a part of the British Commonwealth.

But it is to be noted that though a Labour Party could not as yet be formed, but some of those who were inspired by the ideals of the British Labour had been able to establish a Neo-Fabian Society at Madras in 1919. In this the visit of John Scurr in early 1919 was a great impetus.²

Indeed Madras at this stage was a centre of attempts at forming labour and socialist groups under the inspiration from the British Labour leaders. Wadia and others were the persons concerned. They had supporters in men like Lala Lajpat Rai, Baptista, N. M. Joshi etc but the project did not make much headway. Many factors were responsible for this. Firstly, the British Labour leaders were very lukewarm about the workers' partici-

1. *For detail on this point see, next chapter, Project of a Labour Party.*
2. *The Indian Annual Register, 1919, p. 25.*

pation in the freedom struggle. Their attitude, as defined, in the Labour and the New Social Order (1918), was that the Indian workers, though organised under the banner of a working class Party, should, in the beginning, confine themselves only to the amelioration of immediate economic demands but many of the Indian protagonists of a Labour Party desired the political and economic movement to be integrally connected. Secondly, even with regard to economic demands the 'Indian Socialists' had more advanced, radical views than their British counterparts. Thus in a telegram on the occasion of the first session of the A.I.T.U.C. (1920), 'the Socialists of Madras' stated that the Indian workers demanded industrial control, nationalisation of land, and not mere palliatives such as profit sharing and increase in wages. Col. Wedgewood, while speaking at the Congress, showed his uneasiness at this suggestion and remarked that 'the telegram was an example of impracticable politics of the labour extremists.'¹ Thirdly, many of the trade union leaders did not favour formation of a Socialist Party or group.

While the A.I.T.U.C. thus tended to become the central mouthpiece of the Indian labour, it has to be noted that there still remained many counteracting factors to trade union activity as known in the West. These factors were: (a) No definite system of collecting subscriptions were introduced, and the migratory nature of industrial Labour caused much trouble, (b) there were not many permanent organisations as there was not a permanent industrialised proletariat, (c) a big percentage of workers regularly returned to the villages, and their contact with the union was broken, (d) ignorance and illiteracy of the workers, (e) the large army of floating unemployed, and (f) the vigorous opposition put up by the employers to trade union activity. Despite these there were some good trade unions among the Railwaymen, the miners and the textile workers.

1. *Report of the first session of A.I.T.U.C., p. 32.*

While these had been the basic trends in the A.I.T.U.C., there were a few individuals in the trade unions who were inspired by the ideals of the Russian Revolution. They brought a resolution at the First Congress of the All India Trade Unions to send delegates to the Third Communist International, but this was rejected.¹ It was moved by Singavarelu Chettiar of Madras who later presided over the first legal conference of the Indian Communists at Cawnpur in 1925. These basic trends of the A.I.T.U.C. remained the dominant official line till 1927 when a formidable opposition, developed by the communists, made itself felt, leading ultimately to a split in the A.I.T.U.C. in 1929. To this we shall return in the next chapter.

The Communist International, Communist Pioneers and formation of the Communist Groups.

While attempts were thus being made, partly under the influence of the British Labour Party and partly under the influence of other factors, to organise Indian Labour into Trade Unions and further, unsuccessful attempts were being made to establish an Indian Labour Party, there was a tiny minority of radical youth, both in the Indian National Congress and in the A.I.T.U.C., as well as outside who took inspiration from the ideals of the Russian Revolution. It was not yet quite vocal, nor important, nor organised. It was largely an amorphous group. It had no clear conception of the ideals of the Russian Revolution, nor of the principles of Marxism. Its knowledge of the Revolution had been derived largely from news reports and periodicals and even these sources were necessarily sketchy and scanty. No authoritative books on Marxism or Socialism were available in the country

1. M. N. Roy: *Future of Indian Politics*, p. 104.

and even pamphlets were scarce.¹ The Government policy for long remained antithetical to any percolation of Socialist or Communist ideas in the country. We have already seen how Lala Lajpat Rai condemned this at the first A.I.T.U.C. session. Simultaneously there was an insidious propaganda by the British in respect of Communist attitude to religion and their supposed nationalisation of women; and in a country like India where there is a deep-rooted respect for both, the propaganda had its effect. But when all was said and done a belief grew that the Bolsheviks were enemy of imperialism and ally of underdogs. Finance was for a considerable time a formidable obstacle. To add to the difficulties were the repressions of an over-vigilant government constantly working under the bogey of Bolshevik conspiracy and Russian-bear. By a notification issued on December 6, 1919, the Government of India prohibited the possession of rouble notes in India. The Government of India also instituted a special organisation to deal with Bolshevik activities in the country, and the Central Intelligence Bureau was established in 1921. In the post offices of Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Lahore, Karachi etc special branches and special chemical staff were maintained. However, these youngmen started work under these conditions. Born and grown out of the nationalist movement, but being dissatisfied with the non-co-operation, these young men, who could be counted on finger-tips, started groping their way towards Marxism. To be sure, they were first attracted to the Revolution on purely nationalist grounds; the Revolution appealed to them because it appeared an effective

1. *An idea of how hazy and inadequate pictures of Russian Revolution and Bolshevism percolated through the press can be had on a perusal of Ram's Bolsheviks ki kartut (The Deeds of the Bolsheviks), a novel in Hindi published in October, 1920. To add many stories about the so-called atrocities committed by the Bolsheviks were current. Another book of this period to be noted is, Socialism (Its embryonic development in India) by D. Pant, published from Lahore in 1919. The book is written in a confused way; one of its theses is that socialism has always been a part of Indian culture.*

victory over despotism. They hoped to find therein an understanding of the factors appropriate to the success of the national liberation movement. They also hoped to procure financial and other forms of assistance from the Soviet Union, as the earlier nationalist revolutionaries had from Germany in the realization of their goal of national freedom. However as they came to know more and more about the Revolution and its ideals, they became favourably disposed towards its social and economic ideals also.

Thus, the emergence of this amorphous group gradually moving towards Marxism was an expression of a certain dissatisfaction with current political ideologies and prevalent methods of political action and was indicative of a search for a more revolutionary, more effective outlook. That the Russian Revolution and Marxism could come to their rescue was in itself incidental; in the sense that but for the occurrence of the Russian Revolution they might not have found their way towards Marxism and might probably have returned to the terrorist revolutionary methods of pre-war years, as some of them actually did after February, 1922 when the non-cooperation was called off by the Mahatma.

Among the youth who were thus inspired by the ideals of the Russian Revolution and Marxism, mention may, firstly, be made of Shripat Amrit Dange in Bombay and Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta. Indeed Bombay and Calcutta became the pioneering centres of Indian communism, to be followed soon by Lahore, Madras and Cawnpore. Both Dange and Ahmad are the founder members of the Communist Party of India and both of them have taken prominent part in its activity since its very inception. Both continue to be among the top leaders of this Party and are among its stalwarts.

Dange was born in 1899. His mother died when he was two years old. He passed his Matric in 1917. In

1918 he worked among the workers during the influenza epidemic. His father died early in 1920. Early in 1922, his sister and aunt, who had looked after him so far, died, and thus there remained no family obligations.

He was radical-minded from his student days. He organised students and started a movement against compulsory teaching of the Bible. He became an atheist in 1917. While he was a B.A. student, he was expelled from the College for participating in students' movement.¹

He started his political life as a nationalist, and as a follower of B. G. Tilak, the extremist nationalist leader. In 1905 he participated in the procession in honour of Tilak. He took part in the Home Rule movement at the age of 18. He also took part in the non-co-operation movement (1920) started under the Gandhian leadership. He participated in the boycott movement organised against the visit of Prince of Wales. Gandhijee had criticized this in a letter entitled 'To the goondas of Bombay'. Dange became a critic of Mahatma Gandhi from that day. He lost faith in both Charkha and Ahimsa. Dissatisfied with Gandhijee he became interested in the Russian Revolution, turned to Marxism and made a systematic study of it. He is a pioneer in the communist movement and thought in India. To-day he is among the foremost Marxist theoreticians in India, his outstanding contribution being 'India, from Primitive Communism to Slavery', which is a Marxist study of ancient Indian history and is written after the manner of Engels' 'Origin of Family, Private Property and State.'

In the initial stages Dange's was an indigenous attempt to plant Marxism on the Indian soil. Dange was in touch with the Bombay workers, and later became an outstanding trade union leader. His association with Lotvala, the liberal-minded Bombay industrialist, proved

1. M. Ahmad: *C.P.I. (Years of Formation)*, p. 10.

to be a great factor so far as the production and propagation of Marxist literature at this early stage were concerned. Lotvala helped Dange and other Marxists in Bombay in a variety of ways, and but for his generous help the sapling of Marxism in Bombay would not have developed in the way it did.

Towards the fall of 1920 and beginning of 1921 Dange wrote a pioneering piece of work entitled *Gandhi vrs. Lenin*.¹ The book introduced socialist thought in India. Despite imperfections, it was a bold attempt for those days. The book is an expression of the author's dissatisfaction with the Non-co-operation Movement started by Mahatma Gandhi. Dange had come under the spell of Tilak to whose 'comprehensive genius' he paid a tribute in the book. According to Dange Tilak, by his commentary on Geeta, warned against fatalism and made the people conscious of their rights. He praised Tilak for creating mass-consciousness. It was through him that the intellectuals came to realise their duty to the masses, and to lead them and love them. The author quoted with favour the following utterance of Tilak made in 1906 : "We shall not give the Government assistance to collect revenue. We shall not assist them in carrying on the administration of justice. We shall have our own courts and if time comes, we shall not pay taxes.' Dange felt that as compared to the modern system of fight initiated by Tilak, the Mahatma was introducing the Tolstoyan methods long ago abandoned in Russia.

Young Dange criticized Gandhism on the following grounds : (i) Gandhism attacks the very foundations of modern industrial civilization and introduces spinning economy, (ii) it over-emphasizes moral reform, (iii) it suffers from too much and unwarranted faith in the goodness of human nature, (iv) as a method of political action it is 'feeble' and inadequate.'

1. *It was published in April, 1921, from the Liberty Literature Co., Bombay.*

He admitted that the Plan of 'Bolshevism or extreme Marxism' is incapable of complete realization. Indeed at this stage Dange did not seem to appreciate the Marxian emphasis on violence and coercion. He was equally sceptical about the dictatorship of the proletariat and armed blow. Neither did he like 'the too much neglect of human interests and sentiments' by the Bolsheviks. These elements of the formative stage of Dange's communism have to be carefully noted, in view of the fact that though Dange became, and has remained ever since, a devout communist, yet certain element of non-conformism and angularities have always been Dange's trait. But according to him, the wisest heads in all countries were being drawn to Russia and there were many things in communism which India must imbibe. Two tasks confronted the Indian people: the overthrow of foreign yoke and destruction of evils of capitalism. For this what was needed was revolution, involving the most radical and sweeping changes. Among the items included for a revolution Dange included: (a) refusal to pay taxes, (b) co-operation of the army in this, if possible, and (c) mass action of workers and peasants. He maintained: 'If we win, we will win only by the help of the proletariat, i.e. the labourers and peasants. They are our main support. We are neither for the middle class nor for the corrupt intellectuals'.

Dange was in favour of nationalisation or at least control by the state of the great concerns like railways, mines and big factory plants. There was the need to fix the maximum amount of wealth for an individual. State must have powers to curtail ambitions of individuals and surplus may be appropriated by the state. He advocated the breaking of large estates into small holdings and turning them into peasant-proprietorship.

Dange brought an English weekly, the first of its kind in the country, called 'Socialist' in August, 1922; it conti-

nued publication till March, 1926.¹ He drew around him a number of young radicals among them being, S. V. Ghate, Mansoor, R. S. Nimbkar, K. N. Joglekar, etc. Lotvala purchased the Gujarati daily 'Induprakash' and Dange was entrusted with the task of writing in it on Socialism. In this connection mention may also be made of C. G. Shah, a pioneer of Marxism in India. He was among the first batch of intellectuals influenced by the Russian Revolution. He moved independently till 1922 when he made contacts with Dange.

Like Dange, the life history of Muzaffar Ahmad is the history of the origin and growth of the communist activity in India. Muzaffar was born in August, 1889 of a poor peasant family in an island called Sandwip in the Bay of Bengal. His father, who was a Mokhtar in Sandwip, died in 1905. He had had poor schooling, for he left at the intermediate stage. He had moved to Calcutta for his intermediate and there in 1915 became a whole-time worker of a literary association. Through this association he came in contact with Kazi Nazrul Islam, an army man, with poetic bent of mind. In 1917 he was a store-keeper in the Bengal Government Press. In 1918 he was a translator from Urdu to Bengali in the Urdu section. In 1920 A. K. Fazlul Huq, a left-minded individual, who was later to become Chief Minister of undivided Bengal and still later Governor of East Pakistan, started an evening daily 'Navayug' (New Age) under the joint editorship of Nazrul Islam and Muzaffar Ahmad. The paper specialized in news about workers and peasants. Prior to this Muzaffar, like Dange, had been impressed with the Russian Revolution. He took part in the meetings and demonstrations in connection with the Khilafat movement, Jallianwalabag massacre, and the Reforms Act. He participated in the Non-Co-operation movement. But, like Dange, his activities were not confined to the purely political agitations. He

1. *Spratt maintains that it was stimulated by Roy's propaganda, see, Philip Spratt: Blowing Up India, p. 33.*

moved among sailors and workers on steamers, many of whom came from his area. He entered Indian Seamen's Union in 1918. His paper 'Navayug' used to focus the problems of sailors. It was through these writings that he attracted the attention of the Communist International.

Communism started in India around these and other young people about whom references will be made later. Fortunately, the leaders of the Russian Revolution themselves were keen on spreading their ideas. As Borkenau puts it : "The Russians sincerely believed that they were working for a world revolution and regarded their own revolution as part of it."¹ Economic backwardness of India was no bar for them. Lenin's theory of Imperialism and Revolution carried the implication that revolution could occur at any weakest point in the chain of imperialism. The growing spectacle of the failure of revolution in the Industrial West made the Russian leaders turn to China and India, and other Colonial countries as areas in which revolutionary movements had potentialities for rapid development.

But the first two years of the Revolution found them too pre-occupied with their own problems to embark upon any organised activity in this direction. Moreover, contact with India was impossible in the beginning as the Asiatic territories bordering India had been lost due to civil war.² Even after these territories were regained, direct contact could not be possible; India's being a colony inhibited her relations with the entire world except Britain and parts of the Empire. The exclusion

1. E. Borkenau: *Communist International*, p. 165.

2. These were restored by the end of 1920 and Republics were established in this region and a Treaty was signed with Afghanistan (see *Indian Politics, 1921-22*). In 1921 a Treaty with Persia was also signed whereby both the contracting parties recognised 'the movement for the national liberation of the peoples of the East'. However, in the Russo-Afghan Treaty the Amir refused free transit facilities to Bolsheviks through his country. Moreover, a Treaty between Afghanistan and Britain excluded Russian consulates from near Indo-Afghan frontier [*India in 1922-23*, p. 29].

of Russia from India had long been a major feature of British policy.¹ Necessarily during this period Communist activity from abroad took the form of propaganda.

In October, 1917 the League for the Liberation of the East gave a call for the overthrow of Western Imperialism.² A similar call was given in November, 1917 by the Council of People's Commissars to the peoples of India and other colonial countries. The Council declared that it inscribed the liberation of the oppressed peoples of the world on their banner.

In May, 1918 an appeal was broadcast from an unspecified Indian delegation in the U.S.S.R. to intensify the struggle in India for national independence. The Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia in 1917, already referred to, had enkindled new hopes in the Asian peoples all over the world. In May, 1918 Stalin, the then Commissar for Nationalities, addressed the Conference for the Convocation of the Constituent Congress of the Tatar-Bushkir Autonomous Republic and emphasized that it was the sacred duty of the Soviet Government to meet half way the movement of liberation of the oppressed and exploited masses of the East.³

On November 17, 1918 Izvestia reported receipt of a message from Delhi addressed to the Soviet Government. Its text had been approved in a Delhi meeting at the end of 1917 and published in underground newspapers in January, 1918. The paper reported that the message was delivered under extremely difficult conditions. The message ran: "India salutes the great victory you have won in the interests of world democracy. India marvels at the noble and humane principles you have proclaimed." The message was from an Indian delegation that reached the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1918. Among the delegation were Prof. Ahmad Haris and Prof. Muhammad Hadi. On November 23, 1918 they were received by Lenin. On

1. W. L. Holland: *Asian Nationalism and the West*, p. 38.
2. David N. Druhe: *Soviet Russia and Indian Communism*, p. 14.
3. Birmmell, J. H.: *Communism in South-East Asia*, p. 36.

November 25, 1918, at a meeting of All Russian Central Executive Committee the delegation conveyed a message and greetings. Reciprocating the Executive decided to send greetings to India. On December 5, 1918, at an international meeting Mohammad Hadi maintained that the national consciousness of the Indian people was growing day by day, and was spreading among the masses. The delegation sought aid against the British.¹

It was with the establishment of the Third Communist International in March, 1919 that organised activity in this direction began. Though even this year was largely taken up by propaganda work, yet the International took note of the revolutionary ferment in India and decided to support Nationalist movements in the Far East, and the Russian Communist Party resolved to take measures to develop revolutionary movements in Asia.²

The first Congress of the Communist International held in March, 1919 issued a Manifesto to the proletariat of the entire world. The Manifesto, written by Trotsky, noted: "In India the revolutionary movement has not subsided for a single day, and has lately led to the greatest workers' strike in Asia, which the British Government met by ordering its armoured cars into action in Bombay."³ It maintained: "The emancipation of the colonies is possible only in conjunction with the emancipation of the metropolitan working class. The workers and peasants not only of Annam, Algiers, and Bengal, but also of Persia and Armenia will gain their opportunity of independent existence only when the workers of England and France have overthrown Lloyd George and Clemenceau and taken state power into their own hands. Even now the struggle in the more developed colonies is more than the struggle for national liberation; it is assuming an explicitly social character

1. Anand Gupta (Edited): *India and Lenin*, pp. 43-44.
2. Thesis presented to the Second World Congress of the C.I., 1920.
3. *The Communist International (1919-1943) documents* Vol. I, 1956, by Jane Degras, p. 43.

Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will also be the hour of your own liberation." But the proceedings of the Congress do not show that any Indian attended it as a delegate or otherwise.

According to J. E. Woolcott in January, 1919 large sums were remitted by the Bolsheviks through Helsingfors to India.¹ In March, 1919 the Helsingfors correspondent of the 'London Times' hazarded the theory that 'the tentacles of conspiracy extend far beyond India, and secret leaders are now unquestionably in touch with the Russian Bolshevik movement.'² It forecast that a Bolshevik revolution would break in India in March or April, 1919.

In May, 1919 there came to Moscow an unofficial Afghan Mission under Barkatullah, a member of the Muslim League in Delhi, and also a member of the Indian National Congress. From 1906 to 1914 Barkatullah had been in Japan. He then went to San Francisco. It was there that he received an invitation from Raja Mahendra Pratap to come to Afghanistan. Along with Pratap he reached Kabul in 1915 and remained there till March, 1919. He was prompted to go to Moscow by the Amir of Afghanistan. In a statement to *Izvestia* on May 5, 1919, he, however, declared that he was not a communist or socialist and that his only propoganda was to drive the Britons out.

In July, 1919 Raja Mahendra Pratap also arrived in the Soviet capital. Pratap was an Indian in exile. He had first gone to Germany but later came to Kabul where, in 1915, a Provisional Indian Government had been set up with German assistance. Pratap was a member of this government.³

With crucial change in the war of intervention in Russia during the autumn of 1919, the Bolsheviks could

1. *India on Trial, 1929, p. 29.*

2. *Soviet Russia & the East: A Documentary Survey, p. 23.*

3. Detailed references to his visit in the Soviet Union will be made later.

now devote more attention to the colonial world. Writing in Pravda (July 16, 1920) G. I. Safarov maintained: The Indian revolutionaries have already made contact with the Communist International. Although their organisation is mainly of a national revolutionary nature, the Left radical movement has also taken root.¹

However, it was with the second Congress of the International held in July-August, 1920 that decisions to start communist groups were taken. But before we turn to the decisions of this Congress and their implementation so far as India was concerned, let us first turn to other developments that facilitated the founding of the first communist groups in India and abroad.

The first was the appropriation by the C. I. of the services of the Indian revolutionary M. N. Roy, as well as of very many other Indians living in exile in Europe, America, Japan and the Middle East.

Roy was born on the 6th February, 1887 in village Arbalia in the District of 24-Parganas, Bengal. His real name was Narendra Nath Bhattacharya. The political baptism of Roy took place as a terrorist and revolutionary in the years preceding World War I. The period was one of great tumult in the Indian political scene. The Nationalist Movement was assuming an increasingly militant tone under the Extremists. Though, the younger section generally rallied under the banner of the Extremists, yet the technique of struggle of the Extremists did not satisfy a section of the educated middle class mostly in Bengal. Taking inspiration from the violent anarchical movements in contemporary Europe but basing themselves on the ideals mooted in the Anand Matha of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, they took to the methods of terrorism and bombs. Their idea was that British Imperialism should be terrorised into surrendering political power to the Indian people. Roy, like late Sri Aurobindo in those days, belonged to this group from an early age of 14,

1. *Soviet Russia & the East*, p. 87.

when he joined the Yuganter Group of Yatin Mukherjee. He was twice imprisoned in connection with armed raid cases. But a revolution seldom occurs unless it is supported by the masses of people and it was sheer romanticism to believe in the efficacy of this approach. The weaknesses inherent in the technique of the terrorists were manifested in a concrete manner during the World War One in course of various abortive attempts at violent revolution made by the terrorists in Bengal in collaboration with the Germans. On failure of these attempts, Roy, under the assumed name of Martin, left India early in 1915, and travelled through South-East Asia—Indonesia, China, Japan, Philippines, until he landed in the United States in the spring of 1916. Roy maintains that he went to America as an emissary of 'revolutionary nationalism.'¹

While in the U.S.A., he studied various revolutionary doctrines and came in contact with the labour and socialist leaders like Jay Lovestone. He also studied Marxism, but was not yet a Marxist but a radical nationalist, though he became convinced of the futility of any minority revolution whose driving forces were only a handful of young intellectuals. There was the need for a new approach to the Indian National Revolution. While in the States, he also came in contact with other Indians in exile like Lala Lajpat Rai etc. Roy mentions that one evening while Lala Lajpat Rai was addressing a meeting a questioner asked as to the fate of exploitation after India became free, but his reply was vague. Roy says—"I left the hall alone, still quite confused in my mind, but vaguely visualising a different picture of freedom."² He frequented the New York Public Library to read Marx and, while in the U.S.A., 'accepted socialism without its materialist philosophy.' For his participation in the labour movements Roy became a suspect in the eyes of the United States Government, and had to leave for Mexico in the summer of 1917, under the name M. N. Roy.

1. *Roy Memoirs*, 1st. Feb., 1953, (*Radical Humanist*).

2. *Ibid.*

In Mexico, Roy came in contact with the radicals like Charles Phillips, A. E. Gale, C. Beals etc. According to Roy himself, in 1918 he, along with others, founded the Communist Party of Mexico. He financed *El Socialista*. In Mexico Roy came in contact with Michael Borodin, the Russian commercial representative-cum-revolutionary, and both became friends. Their friendship lasted till 1929. According to Roy, Borodin initiated him in the intricacies of Hegelian dialectics as the key to **Marxism**, but Roy admits that this sudden jump from die-hard nationalism to communism was rather superficial inasmuch as culturally he still remained a nationalist. **Socialism** appeared to him, as it appealed to most Indians, then and later, because of its anti-imperialist connotations. Nevertheless, Roy's journey from anti-imperialist nationalism to communism began in Mexico.¹

Roy tells us that on Lenin's invitation he and his wife Evelyn left Mexico in November, 1919 on a Mexican diplomatic passport under the name of Mr. and Mrs. V. Garcia and arrived in Russia early in 1920.

As Roy was soon to play a prominent role as a leader of Indian communism outside India, it is necessary to take note of his mental equipment as he came to Russia. He had still elements of nationalism in him but he now believed that mere political freedom without economic liberation and social justice as its contents was an untenable proposition. He still believed in the necessity of armed insurrection, but he also came to have an intelligent understanding of the idea of revolution, and the belief gradually grew in him that propagation of that idea was more important than arms.² It was this idea in a germinal form which later found fruition in the doctrine of Radical Humanism whose exponent Roy became in the last phase of his political thinking.

1. *Roy's Memoirs, March 29, 1953.*

2. *Roy Memoirs, August 30, 1953.*

Roy had also come to believe that national freedom could not be achieved unless the middle class agitation was backed by a mass movement. Now, according to him, national independence could only be achieved as a stage in the development of the inevitable social revolution. Thus he was also moving towards acceptance of the theory of class-struggle as an accompaniment of the national movement. On his way from Mexico to Moscow, Roy halted in Germany for sometime, attended communist meetings and came in contact with German communists—Heinrich Bradler and August Thalheimer, his friendship with whom continued even after Roy severed his connections with world communism. While in Berlin he also met some members of the Berlin Indian Revolutionary Committee. Bhupendranath Dutta, a member of this Committee, demanded that Roy should give accounts of his activities since he left India, particularly with reference to the large sum of money that he had received from the Germans during the War.¹

A second factor—an occurrence of a highly incidental character—was the Hijrat Movement.² The word Hijrat means to go away leaving one's country and friends

1. *Roy Memoirs*, November 8, 1953.

2. For a detailed narrative of Hijrat Movement, see (a) *Indian Annual Register*, 1921, Part I, pp. 206-10, (b) *Shaukat Usmani: From Peshawar to Moscow*, (c) L. H. Hutchinson: *Conspiracy at Meerut*, pp. 75-6, (d) *The story of Rafiq Ahmad's Travels, in Communist Party of India and its formation abroad by Muzaffar Ahmad. According to Rafiq Ahmad among the Muhajirs who went to Tashkent were: (1) Muhammad Akbar Khan of N.W.F.P. and a B.A. student in Islamia College, Peshawar, (2) Meer Abdul Majid, (3) Sultan Mahmud of N.W.F.P., (4) Firozuddin Mansoor, (5) Gawhar Rahman Khan of Hazara district, N.W.F.P., (6) Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah of Peshawar, (7) Abdul Qadir Sehrail, (8) Fida Ali, (9) Ghulam Muhammad, (10) Jafar, (11) Abdulla Sajdar, (12) Abdul Matin, (13) Abdur Rahim, (14) Shaukat Usmani, (15) Tajuddin, (16) Masood Ali Shah, (17) Muhammad Hossain, (18) Abdul Qayum, (19) Rafiq Ahmad. They were divided into two groups, one under the elected leadership of Muhammad Akbar Khan of Hazara district and the other under the leadership of Muhammad Akbar Jan of Peshawar. According to Rafiq's testimony the latter was not a good person.*

behind in order to save oneself from oppression. As a result of this nearly 18,000 Muslims left India and went to Afghanistan. It was a peculiar religious immigration movement of the Indian Muslims from North and North-Western part of India which suddenly commenced in the middle of 1920, when batch after batch of Muslims consisting of peasantry, petty shopkeepers and young students, sold all their possessions and left India for Afghanistan on the pretext that they would not stay in a country and under a Government which was oppressing their co-religionists in Turkey and elsewhere. In regard to Turkey, Britain had given promises she did not keep. It was from this disillusionment that the Hijrat movement began. One Ghulam Muhammad was a leading advocate of the Hijrat movement. During this time in India Khilafat Movement was going on on that issue. The Khilafat leaders, however, did not like this immigration. Though Hijrat was largely a religious movement and the Hijratis constituted a heterogenous group yet in this immigrated a number of educated Indians from the Universities over North and North-Western India. Some of these educated young men, who were politically conscious, had taken part in the nationalist struggle and had clear notions of national freedom but according to Usmani, who was one of the Hijratis, they "could not conscientiously acquiesce in the programme of non-violent non-co-operation."¹ This testimony about the level of political consciousness of a minority of the Hijratis is also supported by Rafiq Ahmad,² though M. N. Roy held a contrary view. According to Roy the Hijratis were anti-imperialists but not nationalists.. To them Hijrat movement afforded an opportunity of going outside and studying the methods of winning freedom practised in other countries. Rafiq Ahmad also avers that there were all kinds of people among those who had set out on the Hijrat, yet a minority

1. *Usmani was among those who formed the earlier of these batches. Ibid., p. 1.*

2. *Opt. Cit., p. 14. |*

of them had nursed the idea that from abroad they could discover methods of striking at the British rule in India.¹

At first the Amir of Afghanistan encouraged their exodus but later on he discouraged the move and persuaded many of them to return to India. Others were unwilling to return. Some of them wanted to go to Turkey and others to Russia. Some of the latter met the Soviet Consul who greeted them on behalf of the workers and peasants of Russia,² and gave them visa to go to the Soviet Russia.

At Kabul they met some Indian exiles like Maulana Obaidullah, Abdul Rab Peshawari and Trimul Acharya (Acharya). Rafiq tells us that Rab particularly advised them to go to Russia, the land of the Revolution.

Abdul Rab hailed from Peshawar. He was a highly placed officer of the British Government and knew many languages. Before the First World War he was posted in the British Consulate at Baghdad. The British left Baghdad when war began, leaving Rab behind to supply intelligence to the British, but Rab went over to the side of Turkey. Along with Raja Mahendra Pratap and Trimul Acharya he had come to Kabul.³

Acharya's full name was Khandeyam Pratibadi Bhayankaram Trimul Acharya. He was a follower of Swami Vivekanand. He went to London in his early youth, became an associate of Savarkar, and entered politics. Along with Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (reference about him will be made later) he joined the Anarchist-Communist Party in Paris. Both Rab and Acharya had, along with Raja Mahendra Pratap, met Lenin at Moscow in 1919, and with him (the Raja), they came back to Kabul.⁴ Rab and Acharya had declared themselves communists at Kabul. As will be shown later, it is they who goaded the Muhajirs into the idea of a C.P.I. Rab

1. Muzaffar Ahmad, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 16.

2. Usmani, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 39.

3. M. Ahmad: *Opt. Cit.*, p. 75.

4. Raja Mahendra Pratap: *My meeting with Lenin in Anand Gupta's India and Lenin.*

and Acharya did not stick to communism to the end. Acharya later returned to India and lived in Bombay.

On their arrival in the Soviet Union these Muhajirs were greeted with slogans like 'Long live the solidarity of the oppressed people.' 'Long live the free people of India.' According to Usmani, due to the fanatics in the group who still wanted to go to Turkey they had to leave Soviet for Turkish Anatole. They were surprised to find that even though they were Muslims, they were attacked by the Turkmen tribes and made prisoners. Their lives were saved because of the timely arrival of the Red Army.

According to Usmani about 36 of their batch went to Tashkent, though Rafiq Ahmad keeps the figure as 30. They reached Tashkent in September, 1920, travelling via Bokhara. The total number belonging to different batches reaching Russia was about 100.¹ Usmani came from Bikaner. His real name was Maula Baksh, but he called himself Shaukat Usmani, the glory of the Usmanias. In his statement in the Meerut conspiracy case (1929-33), Usmani maintained that in 1918 he wrote an essay against India joining war and that in 1919 the Gandhian programme had no attraction for him.

As will be shown later, these Muhajirs studied at the military school at Tashkent and when this school ceased to function they joined the newly founded Eastern University in Moscow and subsequently came to India to organise communist activities.

It has to be noted, however, that neither Roy nor these Hijratis were the only Indians available to the International Communist leadership; there were other Indians in exile in Europe and Asia and America who established contacts with the C.I., one such was the Kabul group which had been working since 1915. Among those prominent and active at Kabul were Raja Mahendra

1. *Ibid*, p. 97.

Pratap, Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi, Muhammad Ali; Muhamad Shafiq of Peshawar, Md. Ali Zakaria etc.

Raja Mahendra Pratap was born on 1st December, 1886 in Aligarh District (U.P.). In 1906 he attended the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress and became a champion of Swadeshi. In 1912 he had offered his services to Gokhale. He left India in December, 1914 'on a voluntary exile.'¹ He landed in Marsielles, and from there went to Geneva. His sympathy was with the Germans. In Geneva he came in touch with Shyamjee Krishna Varma and Lal Hardayal. In Geneva he also met Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, and went with him to Germany in February, 1915, where he met Kaiser. At the instance of Chattopadhyaya and the Berlin Committee he left for Afghanistan on 10th April, 1915, along with Maulana Barkatullah, on 'a mission of conquering India.'² After reaching Kabul they founded the Provisional Government of India on 1st December, 1915. Raja Mahendra Pratap was its President, Barkatullah, Prime Minister, and Obaidullah, Home Minister. Obaidullah had come to Kabul directly from India. In Kabul they also helped release of Indians who had come from India, among them was Muhammad Ali, who served as Secretary of the Provisional Government. He later took prominent part in Communist activity.

After the Russian Revolution they tried to establish contacts with Bolshevik Russia. The Raja maintains that he first went to Tashkent in 1917. In March 1918 he went to Petrograd and met Trotsky. He then came to Potsdam and met Kaiser. He points out that his suggestion of organising an international socialist army of Germans, Austrians, Belgians, Turks and Russian Socialists was not accepted by Imperial Germany in 1918. His plan was for such an army to invade India via Russia.

1. *Mahendra Pratap: My life story of fifty years*, p. 24.

2. *Ibid*, p. 39.

The Raja went to Moscow again early in July, 1919 and saw Lenin accompanied by Barkatullah, Abdul Rab, Acharya, Dalip Singh Gill and Ibrahim, a servant. He presented his book 'The Religion of Love' to Lenin. Lenin dubbed the book Tolstoyan and advised the Raja to go back to India and preach the doctrine of class-struggle. Lenin thus observed: "Religion would not save the Indian people. Tolstoy and others like him tried to do the same thing in Russia and failed. Go back to India and preach class struggle, and the road to freedom of India was nearer."¹ According to the Raja, Lenin's government practically compelled him to go to Kabul with their ambassador Sultz.

Md. Ali and Zakaria had, in 1915, crossed over to the North West among the group of fifteen students from Lahore. The real name of Muhammad Ali was Khussi Ahmad. In the Meerut conspiracy case his name was entered as Khussi Muhammad alias Muhammad Ali alias Sipassi. During World War II he was in Paris and was shot dead by the Hitlerite troops. His wife was a Russian. Zakaria's real name was Rahmat Ali. He was a Doctor of Philosophy from the Paris University. His thesis on the Hindu-Muslim problem was written from a Marxist standpoint. The Kabul group later established a Mahabharat Sarvrajya Party whose declared aim was end of capitalist system and welfare of the labouring classes.² It was to work for complete independence and to establish a Federated Republic of all nationalities on the Russian model.³ It is noteworthy that it was strictly to abide by the creed of the Indian National Congress. It also published Fundamental Principles of Sarvraj Republic.⁴

The Ghadar Party in California, referred to earlier, also later sent recruits. Similarly there were groups in

1. An article by Raja Mahendra Pratap: *My meeting with Lenin, in India and Lenin* by Anand Gupta.
2. *The constitution of Federated Republic of India, 1926.*
3. *Ibid*, p. 29.
4. *Ibid*, p. 44.

London, Paris and Berlin. Among these the Berlin group was the most important. Some among these groups became centres of early communist activities outside India. References to them will be made at relevant places.

Meanwhile, the Second World Congress of the Communist International meeting in Moscow (July 17-August 7, 1920) laid the foundation of the ideological guide for communist movements in Colonies and semi-Colonies. At this Congress there were delegations from India. The Colonial Theses that emerged out of this Congress bore the stamp of the controversy that had arisen in preparation of it. The problems that confronted the leaders of the C.I. at the Congress were : what sort of revolution it was that was going to be produced in the Colonies? A 'bourgeois-democratic revolution' or a 'social revolution' or both in quick succession, as in Russia? What were to be the driving forces of revolution? How was the conception of class struggle to be applied to the Colonies? Were the 'bourgeois-democratic' movements in Colonies to be supported in their struggle for national freedom or was social antagonism to be aroused and deepened and a fight to be carried on simultaneously against 'imperialism' and the 'native bourgeoisie'?

In the controversy that raged over these problems two points of view were presented to the Congress, one by Lenin and the other by the Indian Communist, M. N. Roy. In the end, with some modifications, both theses were voted together by the Congress, the views of Lenin having been embodied in Thesis (A) and that of Roy in the supplementary Thesis B.¹ It is to be noted that two other representatives from Asia Sneevliet (Marling) of Indonesia and Sultan-Zade (alias Pishevari) of Persia supported Lenin, rather than Roy.

1. Thesis of the C.I. as adopted, 1920, Moscow : see also Thesis as presented to the Second World Congress of the C.I., 1920.

Lenin, generally speaking, was in favour of lending support to the 'bourgeoisie democratic' liberation movements in the colonies in their fight against Imperialism. He attributed an important revolutionary role to the nationalist movements in those countries.¹ In his article "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nationalities to Self-Determination", Lenin wrote in 1916, "~~Socialists~~ must offer the firmest support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic national liberation movements in those countries: they must help them to revolt, and if necessary, to fight a revolutionary war against oppressive imperialist powers."² He was of opinion that in contrast to the 'national bourgeoisie' in imperialist countries, the "national bourgeoisie" in colonial and dependent countries could support the revolutionary movement of its country against imperialism at certain stages and certain times.

Roy, on the contrary, held that the primary objective of the communists in colonial countries was not so much to support these ephemeral groups of nationalists who were bound to desert fight in the ultimate analysis, but to arouse, develop and deepen social antagonism and to establish communist parties.³ Raising the question of social antagonism within the anti-imperialist movement in the East he pointed out that there were to be found in the colonial countries two distinct movements which every day grow apart from each other: one 'the bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement with a programme of political independence under the bourgeois order', the other, 'the mass action of the poor and ignorant peasants and workers for their liberation from various forces of exploi-

1. M. N. Roy: *Russian Revolution*, p. 217; *Preliminary draft on National and Colonial question, in Theses presented to the Second World Congress, 1920*. It speaks of "the necessity for all communist parties to render assistance to the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in such countries" (*Ibid.*, p. 59).
2. Lenin: *Works*, Vol. XXII, p. 140.
3. *Theses adopted by Second Congress of C.I.*

tation.' The former tended to control the latter. He admitted that the overthrow of foreign capitalism was the first step towards revolution in the colonies and in this the co-operation of the bourgeois nationalist revolutionary elements was useful but this (i.e. securing their co-operation), according to him, was not the primary task.¹

Roy's position has been very lucidly put by Borkenau : "The irruption of modern industry in the East was bound soon to lead to an alignment of forces considerably nearer to the typical situation of the West than that existing in the East before the war. The Bourgeoisie while growing richer would somehow coalesce with the feudal classes and both together would tend to come to a compromise with Western imperialists against proletariat and peasantry."² Only these two classes, according to Roy, would finally lead the anti-imperialist struggle.

Roy held that social antagonism was not only a theoretical possibility but an already existing reality. He held that in most of the colonies there existed organised revolutionary parties or groups which strove in close connection with the working classes.³ Roy, evidently, was relying not only on the great nationalist upsurge that was going on in India at the time but also on the great strike-wave among the workers, and the peasant uprisings that swept the country. This led Roy to assert that the real strength of the liberation movements in the colonies was no longer confined to the narrow circle of bourgeois-democratic nationalists. He, therefore, advocated the policy of establishing contacts with these mass movements of peasants and workers and not with bourgeois nationalist movements. He, no doubt, maintained that the revolution in the colonies was not going to be communist in the first stage, but he asserted that

1. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

2. E. Borkenau : *Communist International*, p. 292.

3. *Theses*, p. 14.

if from the outset the leadership were in the hands of the communist vanguard, the revolutionary masses would not be led astray on the right road towards their goal. Roy agreed that in the overthrow of foreign capitalism, which was the first step towards revolution in the colonies, the co-operation of the 'bourgeois nationalist revolutionary elements' was useful, but, according to him, the first and most necessary task was the formation of Communist Parties which would organise the peasants and workers.¹

In the first stages, according to Roy, the revolution in the colonies must be carried on with a programme which would include many petty-bourgeois reforms but from this it did not follow that the leadership of revolution would have to be surrendered to the bourgeois democrats. Therefore, the C.I. must establish relations with these revolutionary forces working for the overthrow of imperialism.

Roy also tried to link this social antagonism in the colonies with the general proletarian revolution in the West. He held that capitalism derives its main strength from colonial possessions without which it could not maintain itself even for a short time.² According to him the proletarian revolution in the West was inseparably bound with and even dependent on revolution in the colonies, the workers in the West having been bribed by their capitalists derived strength from the colonial exploitation.³

Lenin did not deny the importance of social antagonism implicit in the situation in the colonial countries and its maturing importance for the world proletarian revolution. This was implicit in his own earlier writings, but

1. *Thesis of the C.I. (complete), as adopted by the Second Congress, 1920, pp. 14-15.*
2. *Additional Thesis, Second Congress of C.I., p. 12.*
3. *Ibid., see, also, Roy: The Empire & Socialism: Labour Monthly, Oct. 1922. He says "the overthrow of bourgeois order in Europe will not be realised alone by the advanced proletariat of Europe".*

he disagreed with the heavy emphasis which Roy seemed to place on an indigenous class conflict in Asia.¹

He also did not agree with Roy's assumption that the revolutionary movement in Europe was absolutely dependent on the course of revolution in Asia. He maintained that "Comrade Roy goes too far in declaring that the destiny of the West would exclusively rest upon the degree of development and the strength of peasant and working class revolution in Asian countries."² This one-sided emphasis was alien to the whole outlook of Lenin's tactics and strategy. Sultan-Zade, the Persian delegate, also supported Lenin's view.

Lenin's advocacy of support to national-liberation movements in colonial countries was never absolute, it was not an infallible general rule applicable to 'any stage and any epoch even of a colonial revolution.'³ He accorded support on two conditions: (a) presuming an actual struggle and (b) presuming a real freedom of organisation on the part of working class and peasantry.⁴ Not even for a moment did he believe that Asian Nationalism could be a more powerful revolutionary force than communism. He counted upon it as a possible ally, an instrument for promoting the proletarian world revolution.⁵ The Draft Thesis of the Second Congress of C.I., in the preparation of which Lenin had taken the main part, spoke of the necessity of a decisive struggle against the tendency to dress up 'the bourgeois-democratic liberation movements in backward countries in the colour of communism.'⁶ The theses finally adopted held that the Communist International must support such movements "only with the

1. Robert Carver North, introduction to *Nym Wales' book, Red Dawn*, p. 6.
2. *Report of the Second Congress of the C.I.*
3. *International Press Correspondence, December, 1927.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. M. N. Roy: *Communism in Asia, Pacific Affairs, September, 1951.* Stalin echoes the master when he regards national liberation movement 'as a reserve of the revolutionary proletariat,' (J. Stalin: *Problems of Leninism*, p. 61).
6. *Thesis presented to the Second Congress, 1920, p. 59.*

object of rallying the constituent elements of the future proletarian parties—which will be truly communist and not only in name in all backward countries and educating them to a consciousness of their special task namely that of a struggle against the bourgeois-democratic trend in their nation. The C.I. should collaborate provisionally with the revolutionary movement of the colonies and backward countries, and even form an alliance with it; but it must not amalgamate itself with it; it must unconditionally maintain the independence of the proletarian movement, even if it is only in an embryonic stage.”¹ Lenin himself, then, was not oblivious of the existence of social antagonism in the colonies and semi-colonies but he desired the communists to support and even work in the nationalist movements of these countries precisely on the same ground that he enjoined upon the Western European Communists to work in the existing Labour Parties, that is, with a view to utilising these already existing Left platforms, to enlarge their influence while maintaining the independence of communists in these movements. At the Congress Lenin criticised the ‘Leftism’ of some British Labour leaders who rejected Parliamentarism and refused to work in the ‘reformist’ trade unions. This, he thought, was inevitable because of the fact that the Communist Parties in these countries had to start in a virgin soil. This had to be more emphasised in the case of the economically backward areas of colonial countries like India where working class movements had not matured sufficiently to be effective.

To Lenin, therefore, it was not proper to condemn the nationalist movements in the colonies as being outright reactionary simply because the ultimate objective of the communists was something different. It was because of this that he criticised Radek for publishing an article during War on the Irish Movement suggesting that since at the head of the movement there was not the ‘proleta-

1. *Theses on the national and colonial question adopted by the Second Comintern Congress.*

riat', the entire movement was of little interest to communists.¹ He also took issue with Piatskov on this question and advocated 'dual' action: (a) "an action on the part of the nationally oppressed proletariat and peasantry, together with the nationally oppressed bourgeoisie against the oppressor nations," and (b) 'an action on the part of the proletariat of the oppressed nation, or at least the class conscious portion thereof, against the bourgeoisie.'²

These controversies were debated in a specially appointed Commission on National and Colonial questions. Lenin reported back to the Congress on the deliberations of this Commission and the unanimous opinion at the Congress at the end was that in dealing with national movements in the colonies communists should make a distinction between 'bourgeois democratic movements' and 'national revolutionary movements', and should support only the latter.³ Thus the phrase 'bourgeois-democratic' in Lenin's thesis was substituted by 'national revolutionary' so as to distinguish between revolutionary nationalism and national reformism. The Congress was of the view that the bourgeois-democratic parties in the colonies are of various kinds. Specially there are two trends in the Colonial movements, reformist and national revolutionary. The communists should support national revolutionary movements but only when these are really revolutionary,

1. *International Press Correspondence*, 29 December, 1927.
2. *Ibid*, Piatskov had in an article criticised Lenin's attitude on the ground that in the 'epoch of imperialism' there could be no question of national community anywhere and that the urge for national self-determination amounted to defence of national frontiers and that Lenin's idea of a bloc between the 'bourgeoisie and the proletariat' would lead to social patriotism which would amount to encouraging national hatred as distinct from class hatred. He advocated principle of 'monism'. But Lenin advocated 'dualistic view.' See, *Lenin*, Vol. XIII, pp. 371-72.
3. This is not to say that differences were finally resolved. In amended forms both the Theses of Lenin and Roy were passed. But while Lenin's Thesis spoke of 'support to revolutionary movement of liberation, the form of support to be determined by a study of existing conditions'. Roy's Thesis spoke of establishing support with those 'revolutionary forces that are working for overthrow of imperialism'.

the reformist ones should not be supported. It was also the view of the Congress that the peasantry usually support national revolutionary movements, and in such countries the C.P. cannot be successful unless it supports the peasants. Even support to revolutionary national movements was to be extended only if these nationalists did not oppose the communist work of enlightening and organising the workers and the peasantry. It was specifically mentioned that if this did not happen, then the communists were obliged to fight against the reformist bourgeoisie in those countries.¹

While Lenin, thus, seemed to concede to Roy on the question of support to the national revolutionary movements, in reporting to the Congress on behalf of the Commission on National and Colonial question, he declared that it was mere romanticism to believe that the proletariat in the colonies was alone in a position to carry on the task of revolution without entering into definite relations with the peasant masses. He maintained: "Every nationalist movement can be bourgeois democratic one because the masses there are peasants. It would be utopian to suppose that the proletariat—so far as there is chance of forming such—are in a position to carry on communist activity and communist policy without getting into definite relations with the peasants."²

To ensure the support of the peasant masses and to activate work among them an Agrarian Programme was also adopted at the Congress wherein the communists were advised to support peasant movements against the landlords, against possession of large estates, against all customs and remnants of feudalism. But the programme differentiated among sections of peasants such as agricultural proletariat or hired labourers, semi-proletariat or small peasants, little proprietors and small farmers, and landed peasants and accordingly formulated its attitude.

1. *Proceedings of the Second Congress of the C.I., 1920, p. 113.*

2. *Ibid, p. 113.*

With regard to the agricultural proletariat it maintained that this class was the natural ally of the proletariat and there was need for independent organisation of the class, separated from the other groups of country population so as to win it over to the side of the Soviet power and of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The thesis emphasized it to be the fundamental task of Communist Parties in all countries.

The semi-proletariat or small peasants earned their living partly by working for wages on agricultural and industrial establishments and partly on their own or rented piece of land. This class was large and the communists must take special note of it.

Little proprietors and small farmers were in no need of wage. The thesis held that this class gains by victory of the proletariat because of (a) liberation from rent payment, (b) abolition of mortgages, (c) abolition of many forms of pressure. But in transition period there may be partial hesitation. This class must be neutralized.

The landed peasants are capitalists in agriculture. This is the most numerous element of the bourgeois class and the decided enemy of the revolutionary proletariat. There was need for struggle against this class. But the expropriation even of the landed peasants could by no means be an immediate object of the victorious proletariat, considering the lack of material, particularly of technical material, and further of the social conditions necessary for socialization of such lands. They were to strive to give the peasant movement a revolutionary nature bringing about a closer union between the West European Communist proletariat and the revolutionary movements of peasants.

On theoretical grounds the thesis also stated that with the assistance of the proletariat of the advanced countries the backward countries could arrive at Soviet form of organisation and through certain stages pass on to communism without passing through the stage of capitalist economy. Peasant Soviets were applicable in pre-capital-

ist relations and therefore propagation of the idea of peasant Soviet was desirable.

As regards Communist Parties the necessity of establishing strong, independent nuclei of communist activities and party organisations in the colonies was acknowledged. As regards the nature of organisation, the Congress resolved that apart from the open, legal activity and organisation every Communist Party should organise an illegal underground machinery.

The decisions of the Second Congress can be thus summarised :

(a) National movements were of bourgeois democratic character.

(b) Revolutionary national bourgeoisie had to be supported in its struggle against imperialism.

(c) Even if it were revolutionary, the bourgeois national-democratic movements were not to be given a communist label.

(d) Independent Communist Parties had to be built, and their independence preserved at all costs.

(e) The working class must enter into definite relations with the peasant masses without which it can't succeed in the colonies.

(f) Communists must participate even in conservative trade unions with a view to remove reformists and centrists from all responsible positions in the labour movements.

It was as a result of the deliberations and decisions of this Congress that the story of Indian communism in India and abroad began almost simultaneously from September-October, 1920, to which we shall now turn.

The Executive Committee of the C. I. had set up a small Bureau of five which was to be in permanent session as the supreme policy-making executive organ of the International. Roy was coopted a member of this Bureau.

Meeting immediately after the Second Congress the Bureau passed two resolutions : (a) to hold the first Congress of the Peoples of the East and (b) to set up a Central Asiatic Bureau of the C. I. at Tashkent. Sokolnikov, the Commander of the Red Army in Central Asia, Safarov and Roy constituted the Asiatic Bureau.¹

Roy and other Indian revolutionaries shifted to Tashkent immediately after the conclusion of the Second Congress. A broad political conference of colonial peoples, called the Congress of the Peoples of the East, was held in Baku from September 1-20, 1920, under the presidentship of Zinoviev. Zinoviev, Bela Kun and Radek were the moving spirits behind the Congress. Roy was opposed to the idea of the Congress. Consequently, he did not attend it and sent Abani Mukherjee instead. Roy called it Zinoviev's circus.² According to Usmani it was a conglomeration of motley people.³ Though according to its sponsors its main task was to devise ways and means of revolutionising the East, but it did not achieve anything tangible except wild, fiery speeches including Zinoviev's slogan of a holy war against British Imperialism. Among the numerous delegates to the Congress were Ho Chi Minh and quite a few Indians.

As a result of the deliberations of this Congress a short-lived council of 47, called Council of Propaganda and Action of the Peoples of the East, representing 20 nationalities was set up and a paper called the Peoples of the East was issued. But the Council did not last even for a year, and the life of the paper was still short.⁴

In October, 1920 a Military School for training Indians, mainly the Muhajirs, was set up and an India House was also established. American Wobbly John, who had come from Moscow with Roy, became Principal of the School.

1. *Roy Memoirs* : February 28, 1954.

2. *Roy Memoirs*, February 28, 1954.

3. *Usmani, Opt. Cit.*, p. 100.

4. *W. Z. Foster : History of the Three Internationals, Book II, pp. 30-31.*

The establishment of the School was in pursuance of a plan to create an army of liberation of India. The idea, firstly, was to supply the frontier tribes with the sinews of war so that they could make trouble for the British Government in India and, secondly, to invade and liberate India.¹ Further, once a foothold on Indian soil was established, prominent nationalist leaders were to be contacted with a view to connecting the two movements. Roy and other Indians like Usmani, Rafiq, Raja Mahendra Pratap, etc., visited places on the frontier many times to find out suitable land routes and to establish contacts.

Though the idea of the school fructified because in early days these revolutionaries wanted to engineer a replica of the Russian revolution in India as they understood it, based upon violence and with the support of the proletariat but the Russians generally kept themselves aloof, and the idea was later given up.

This idea of the Military School and of the army of liberation was amateurish. To even think that a few trained Indians would be capable of waging war against the British was a remnant of the old thinking of these terrorist revolutionaries who had worked in conjunction with the Germans during the War. Moreover, under the leadership of Roy they were still thinking in terms of a national democratic revolution. If at all, what these Indians needed, was political rather military training.

The story of Indian Communism outside India began at Tashkent itself. Some of the Muhajirs were so enthusiastic that the emigre Communist Party of India was formed at Tashkent towards the end of 1920.² The main inspirers behind this were Abdul Rab, T. Acharya and Abani Mukherjee, though Roy was opposed to the move.

1. *Roy Memoirs*, 28th March, 1954: He says 'The base of the projected army of liberation was to be created at Tashkent.'
2. Muzaffar Ahmad, himself a founder-member of the C.P.I. in India keeps the date as Oct.-Nov., 1920. He relies on the reminiscences of Rafiq Ahmad, one of the Muhajirs for this emphatic assertion. (*M. Ahmad: The C.P.I. and its formation abroad*, p. 32).

In view of his advocacy of a Communist Party at the Second Congress of the C. I. to exert pressure on the nationalist movement and to take up its leadership in case of 'betrayal by the bourgeoisie', this opposition of Roy might appear inexplicable unless it were remembered that Roy had a poor estimate of the political consciousness of the Muhajirs and if he could have his way his plan was not to convert them to communism but to awaken in them the minimum measure of political consciousness.¹ Roy further held that a Communist Party, if it were to be true to its existence, must work among the masses, but as India was away, the Communist Party of India at Tashkent would be an anachronism.

But there was a deeper reason why Roy opposed the move. Writing much later about the Indian revolutionaries in the U.S.A., Roy maintained that it was a story of jealousy, intrigues and deceit,² but the same description applies in an equal measure to the revolutionaries at Tashkent who were beset with divisions and dissensions. On the one hand, there was the group led by Abdul Rab, and it included Trimul Acharya and Khalil Bey. The other group was led by M. N. Roy and included Abani Mukherjee, Muhammad Ali and Md. Shafiq. Already at Kabul there were differences between Rab, Acharya and Shafiq, on the one hand and Pratap, Barkatullah and Obaidullah on the other. Rab and Acharya had declared themselves communist while at Kabul, and they constantly implored the Russian legation not to extend aid to the Raja's group as they were not communists.

Rab, who often called himself father of the revolution, was a typical arrogant mystic thirsting more for name and power than actual work.³ Roy regarded Rab as an imposter, and Acharya as an anarchist.⁴ Abani Mukherjee had been

1. *Roy Memoirs, May 2, 1954.*

2. *Roy Memoirs, 1st March, 1953.*

3. *Usmani, Opt. Cit., p. 103.*

4. *Roy Memoirs, May 2, 1954.*

the leader of the Indian delegation at the Baku Congress, and though he associated himself with Roy at Tashkent but he nurtured a secret rivalry and wanted to supplant Roy as the leader of the communist movement in India.

The rivalry between these two groups grew intense at Tashkent, the conflict veered mainly round the issue of leadership, but it also involved finance. Each group made strenuous efforts to win the allegiance of the Hijratis, a majority of whom joined the group of Roy, but some also joined the group led by Rab; while some remained neutral. Rafiq affirms that they could follow a good deal, though not all, of what Roy expounded to them but they could hardly understand what Rab's group was like. Usmani, too, avers that Roy was sincere, frank, a man of learning but an impractical man.¹ As a result of the majority joining his group, Roy's position in the C. I. was somewhat strengthened, and partly in deference to the wishes of these Muhajirs Roy stopped his opposition to the plan of establishing a C. P. I. at Tashkent.

Among the persons who joined the emigre C. P. I. at Tashkent were : M. N. Roy and his first wife Evelyn Roy, Abani Mukherjee and his Russian wife Rosa, Md. Shafiq, Masood Ali Shah, Md. Ali and Zakaria. Rab and Acharya were already in the party by virtue of the fact that they had declared themselves communist while at Kabul.²

But these activities of the emigre Indians could not go unnoticed at the hands of an over-vigilant British Government which, in a formal communication, protested to the Soviet Government against their activities and against the establishment of the Military School. Partly because the Soviet Union did not want a rupture in relation and partly because there was a realization by 1921 of the futility of engineering an armed revolution in India, the

1. *Ibid*, p. 103.

2. *Rafiq, Opt. Cit.*, p. 32.

Soviet Union entered into an agreement with the British Government in March, 1921 by which each party refrained from undertaking hostile action against each other and from undertaking outside of its own frontiers any official propaganda, direct or indirect, against each other. The Russian Government further refrained from any attempt, by military or diplomatic or any other form of action or propaganda, to encourage any of the peoples of Asia in any form of hostile action against British interests or British Empire, specially in India. Consequent upon this agreement the school closed down, though the propaganda work at Tashkent went on for some time.

After the closure of the Military School a few Indians, including Md. Akbar Khan, returned to India through the North-West but a number of them went to Moscow in May, 1921 where they joined the University of the Toilers of the East established in April, 1921 and received further training there.¹ At the same time Roy also moved to Moscow along with these Muhajirs to attend the Third Congress of the Communist International.

The emigre Communist Party of India, which had already been formed at Tashkent towards the end of 1920, was reorganised in Moscow in May-June, 1921 and it was then affiliated to the Communist International. It functioned in Moscow so long as the Eastern University existed, that is, till 1926. Muhammad Shafiq who had been elected as the Party's first Secretary at Tashkent was again made its Secretary, and a Working Committee consisting of M. N. Roy, Md. Shafiq and Abani Mukherjee was constituted. Among the Muhajirs who joined the Party at Moscow were : Shaukat Usmani, Gawhar Rahman, Rafiq Ahmad, Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah, Sultan Mahmud,

1. *The first seventeen Indian students of the University were : Gowhar Rahman Khan, Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah, Sultan Muhammad, Meer Abdul Mazeed, Firozuddin Mansoor, Fazle Ilahi Qurban, Abdulla Safdar, Shaukat Usmani, Rafiq Ahmad, Habib Ahmad Naseem, Fida Ali Zahir, Abdul Qadri Sehrat, Masood Ali Shah, Abdul Qayyum, Maulana Abdul Hamid, Sayeed, and Aziz Ahmad.*

Meer Abdul Mazeed, Firozuddin Mansoor, Fida Ali Zahid, Fazle Elahi Qurban and Abdulla Safdar.

But the news of the formation of the emigre C. P. I. at Tasnkent had not been happily received by the Berlin group. Early in 1921 thirteen Indians and one American belonging to the group made a journey to Moscow to present their case to the C. I., their expenses being borne by the C. I. Their journey was a typical illustration of jealousy, rivalry and dissension among the emigre Indians, and the ambivalent nature of their association with the C.I. and Communism. Those in the group were :

1. Bhupendranath Datta.
2. Virendranath Chattopadhyaya.
3. Birendranath Das Gupta.
4. Abdul Wahid.
5. Pandarang Khankhoje.
6. Ghulam Ambia Khan Luhani.
7. Hirambalal Gupta.
8. Nalini Gupta.
9. Agnes Smedley.¹

Though Chattopadhyaya was the leader of the group, Luhani was their spokesman. Chattopadhyaya could not give clear exposition of anything and Agnes Smedley held extreme views in everything. Next in rank was Bhupendranath Datta.

Chattopadhyaya, the brother of the famous nationalist leader and poetess Sarojini Naidu, was the eldest son of Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya of Hyderabad. After passing his B.A. examination in 1903, Virendranath went to London to appear at the I.C.S. examination, but failed, because of his involvement in political work. He became associated with the 'India House', a boarding house for Indians established by Shyamjee Krishna Varma in 1905. Chatto also joined the 'New League' and 'Free India Society' set up by Savarkar. In September, 1909 Chatto-

1. M. Ahmad, *Op. Cit.* p. 98.

padhyaya went to Paris and collaborated with Madame Cama, who had declared herself Socialist, in her work for freedom of India. While at Paris he also came in contact with anarchists. Dr. Datta maintains that Virendranath Chattopadhyaya and Trimul Acharya became members of the anarchist-communist group in Paris.¹ On the eve of the World War One Chattopadhyaya went to Germany. He was the spokesman of the emigre Indian revolutionaries in their pact with the German Government. Roy maintains that he was a live wire.

Dr. Bhupendranath Datta, Birendranath Das Gupta and Hirambalal Gupta had been members of the terrorist-revolutionary movement of Bengal. Dr. Datta, brother of Swami Vivekanand, was associated with the weekly 'Yugantar'. In 1907 Dr. Datta was arrested, sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment, and after his release went to the U.S.A. in 1908. Roy maintains that Datta did not believe that Bolshevik rule in Russia would last long; and when they had met at Berlin he had also ridiculed the idea of Roy going there.²

Luhani hailed from the district of Pabna in North Bengal. His father was a Mokhtar. He passed his B.A. from Muir Central College, Allahabad. He left for London in 1913. In London he had joined the 'Socialist Club'.

Khankhoje was a Maratha. He went to the U.S.A., and organised an 'Indian Independence League' in 1907 in California. He took his M.A. degree there. After the outbreak of the World War One, he went to Turkey. In 1919 he secretly came to Bombay, met B. G. Tilak etc. but could not find much encouragement from them and went back. He returned to India in 1949. Abdul Wahid hailed from Bihar. He died abroad.

Agnes Smedley was an American lady who had a passion for the freedom of India. After the First World

1. *Bhupendra Nath Dutta: Unpublished political history (in Bengali), p. 255.*
2. *Roy Memoirs, November 8, 1953.*

War she came to Germany. There she was introduced to Chattopadhyaya and the two later got themselves married.

Nalini Gupta's full name was Nalini Kumar Das Gupta. He had left India in 1913. He had been a terrorist but was not a member of any terrorist group. He hailed from East Bengal. He did not really belong to any group. He was purely a seeker of fortune, with a certain inborn streak of daredevilry.¹ He was a good courier.

Many of them belonged to the Berlin Indian Revolutionary Committee organised with the help of the Germans during the War. The Committee proposed to function as a provisional Government in exile. One Muhammad Mansoor,² who had gone to Germany to study philosophy on a Government scholarship, was the first President of the Committee, but he was pushed back when the revolutionaries from America came to Berlin.

The Berlin Indian revolutionaries declared that Roy had no right to speak on behalf of India. According to them the Berlin group alone was the representative organisation of Indian revolutionaries and all help should be accorded to them. They also challenged the propriety of forming the emigre C.P.I. at Tashkent. In a long thesis prepared under Chattopadhyaya and Smedley, they contradicted the thesis posed by Roy at the Second Congress. They also demanded money to start a paper in Berlin to propagate for Indian independence which was their main aim.

They sought an interview with Lenin, who agreed to receive their three representatives, that is, Chatto, Datta and Khankhoje. Lenin gave them a patient hearing but made it clear that the Soviet Government could not

1. M. Ahmad, p. 113. According to Spratt he was an adventurous type., Opt. Cit., p. 35.

2. Mansoor later went to Moscow, but was suspected of espionage, and it was on Roy's intervention that he was released. He went back to Germany where he lived till 1930, (Roy Memoirs, Nov. 8, 1953). Roy maintains that during his trial in Cawnpore jail, Mansoor was a prosecution witness.

actively take part in any plan for promoting revolution in other countries, and that the thesis adopted at the Second Congress still stood good, and further that if they wanted a change they should prepare a draft for the consideration of the ensuing Third Congress. He also asked them to see Radek, the Secretary of the C.I. This interview with Lenin disappointed the Indian revolutionaries.

When they met Radek, he promised to ask the E.C.C.I. to appoint a small committee to hear their case. This committee consisted of Thalheimer, Quelch and Borodin, who were all pro-Roy

When their charges were being discussed by the Commission Thalheimer asked them if they had any objection to work in co-operation with Roy. They replied that they would co-operate only if the C.P.I. at Tashkent were dissolved and Roy dissociated himself from Abani Mukherjee. Roy pointed the conditions under which the C.P.I. was formed, and maintained that though he did not approve of the idea, he could not agree to its dissolution unless others concerned agreed to it. Disillusioned, most of them soon left Moscow, but Chatto, Smedley, Datta, Luhani and Gupta stayed behind to press their claims. They demanded dissolution of the C.P.I. and threatened that if their demands were not accepted they would leave Moscow. When this was not done three of them left Moscow, one by one. Only Gupta and Luhani remained. After return from Moscow Dr. Datta and others set up new Committee in 1922.

Apart from personal jealousies and rivalries, finance and leadership constituted the two main points of dissension among the Indian revolutionaries abroad. That is why the Berlin revolutionaries objected so fiercely to the formation of an emigre C.P.I. under the leadership of Roy, although some of them called themselves communist. In reality their objective, if any, was national independence, wherein there was no scope for labour movement, which ideal also they wanted to be realized through them and nobody else. Except Luhani and V. Chattopadhyaya, none

among the Indian revolutionaries who had gone to Moscow ever joined any Communist Party. An extreme view about them aired by both Roy and Muzaffar Ahmad is that they had gone to Moscow in quest of opportunities and that the issue really was one of finance.¹

While the Indian revolutionaries thus wrangled among themselves, the Third Congress of the Communist International meeting in June-July 1921 assessed the situation and came to the conclusion that the post-war revolutionary ferment was over. It gave the slogan of the United Front and emphasized the necessity of winning the masses. It renounced armed uprisings and acknowledged the necessity of a longer period of preparation. Naturally not much attention was paid to the colonial question at this Congress, the work being assigned to a Commission. Roy protested against the opportunist way in which the Eastern question was being discussed. However, as a result of the Third Congress greater stress was laid on the formation of an indigenous C.P.I. Further, the Tashkent Bureau of the C.I. was dissolved and in its place the Eastern Section of the C.I. was opened.

Immediately after the conclusion of the Third Congress Roy was asked to proceed to Tashkent and wind up the show there. Roy completed the work of dissolution and other necessary arrangements by September-October, 1921.

Immediately after the Third Congress Roy also despatched Nalini Gupta to India as a messenger of the Communist International. Nalini stayed in Bengal for some time, contacted revolutionaries like Muzaffar and returned in 1922.

Roy returned to Moscow in the autumn of 1921 with 22 Muhajirs. At the same time Acharya and Rab also returned from Tashkent to Moscow, but the two were

1. *M. Ahmad, Opt. Cit., p. 130.*

not on good terms then. Muhammad Ali and Zakaria also came to Moscow from Kabul.

About this time Abani Mukherjee was expelled from the Communist Party on the charges levelled by the Berlin group for betrayal in the past and espionage thereafter.

In the meanwhile, the movement in India for the formation of the C.P.I. that started in the second half of 1920 produced some results in 1921 when efforts were made to organise a Communist Party. Reporting to the Executive Committee of the C.I. in June, 1921 Eliawa maintained that in 1921 the C.I. was already taking offensive against the foundations of capitalism in India.

By 1921-22 Communist centres were established in Bombay, Calcutta, Lahore, and Madras and a little towards the end of the period at Cawnpore. Thus in March 1922, speaking of the work of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, Zinoviev could boast that with the help of the Executive Committee organised Communist groups had been formed in India, where even at the Third Congress the C.I. had only weak circles of supporters.

As already indicated Dange was the moving spirit at Bombay. His work among the workers of Bombay and his publications, particularly his paper Socialist, attracted others like Ghate who were working independently on Left lines. Ghate, like Dange and Muzaffar, had been a radical and protestant from his student days. His first experience of "struggle" was in 1915 in a strike of students against the Principal of the college in which he was reading. He left the college and moved to Bombay. He was also influenced by the Russian Revolution. He went through many changes in profession; he was first manager of a firm, then joined college in 1920, and thereafter was in charge of the management of a hotel for some years. In the meanwhile he developed habits of reading and read Vivekanand, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky,

Shaw and Kautsky's Proletarian Revolution. The strikes of 1919-20 and the first session of the A.I.T.U.C. finally converted him to the Left.

Following the contact with Dange he was able to read in a more orderly manner. He tells us that as early as 1922, he read the Communist Manifesto and also some articles by R. P. Dutt.¹ He also came across the Vanguard, and contacted its editor, M. N. Roy, through correspondence.

He recalls how Marxist books were difficult to procure then and how they managed to have them. "We had to think up so many ingenious ways of getting literature smuggled in past the vigilant eyes of the police and customs officials."²

In Calcutta Muzaffar Ahmad was the rallying centre of communists and other leftists. Muzaffar and his associates had to work under the same limitation, namely paucity of finance and non-availability of Marxist literature, which confronted other communists in other parts of India. In 1920-21 poet Nazrul Islam was also involved when plans were being made in Calcutta regarding the formation of the Communist Party. He, however, did not join the party, though he became one of the founders of the Labour Swaraj Party formed later. As Dange was fortunate in having obtained the patronage of the rich liberal-minded Lotvala, so also was Muzaffar in having secured the friendship of Qutubuddin Ahmad in 1922. Qutubuddin was at one time a colleague of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the renowned nationalist leader. He used to both buy and read a lot of books, and his vast library was readily available to Muzaffar and his left friends. Qutubuddin was also one of the founders of the Labour Swaraj Party. During the second World War he also joined the Communist Party. He died in 1948.

1. S. V. Ghate: *Reminiscences, in New Age, April, 1958.*

2. *Ibid*, p. 63.

In 1922 Muzaffar was also joined in his work by Abdur Razzak Khan and Abdur Halim, both of whom continue to be prominent members of the C.P.I. Both of them had participated in the Non-Co-operation movement and had suffered imprisonment.

Muzaffar and his men were inspired by the C. I. and had also contacts with it. Of his work in those days Muzaffar himself observes : "Compared to those who took the lead in forming the C.P. in France and China in 1921, we were very few in numbers and at least I was fully conscious of my inadequacy. My knowledge of Marxism was very superficial. When I took the leap into the unknown in those days, I knew my stock in trade was faith in the people and loyalty to the directives of the C.I. I had neither any money nor any means of livelihood."¹

Ghulam Hussain was working in Lahore. He had been a lecturer of Economics in Islamia College, Peshawar. He was a friend of Mohammad Ali. As already mentioned in his student days, Mohammad Ali had left Lahore in 1915 and had gone out to Kabul, along with some other students, to prepare himself for revolutionary work. After the Russian Revolution he went to Russia and joined the Communist Party. It was he who called Ghulam Hussain to Kabul and influenced him towards Marxism. Hussain became a convert and came back to Lahore with a mission to build up a Communist Party. From Lahore he used to bring out a monthly in Urdu called *Inquilab*. He also became Secretary of the North-Western Railway Workers' Union. He was later a convict in Cawnpore Conspiracy case (1924), but confessed, and asked for mercy. Thereupon he was freed.

In 1921-22 Singavarelu Chettiar, an old lawyer of Madras, declared himself communist. He moved the resolution on the National Independence at the Gaya session of the Indian National Congress (1922). He

1. M. Ahmad : *Our First Days*, New Age, April, 1958. pp. 15-16.

claimed that he was the first to address the A.I.C.C. as 'comrades' in 1923.¹ He was later to preside over the first legal conference of the Indian communists at Cawnpore in 1925. He had a good library of Marxist literature.

In India these amorphous groups, which were neither strong nor influential, existed as illegal bodies in the beginning.² Numerically weak they existed more on paper than in reality. Communism still existed at the level of ideas only and communist groups were more propaganda groups or ideological centres than a party; the strength of communism in India at this stage being mainly intellectual. Speaking at the Fifth Congress of the Communist International, Zinoviev observed that in the beginning communist parties were only great propaganda societies and maintained that they took to this attitude owing to the seething discontent of the masses at the end of the imperialist war.³

They thus did not form any party; indeed no Central Committee of the Party was held till December, 1925, but they were in touch with the C.I., and often contacted each other through correspondence. They also received occasional aid from Roy etc. They formed nuclei around which communist activity was to develop and extend later.

In India their difficulty was that having imbibed Marxism in varying degrees and having been drawn to the ideals of the Russian Revolution with different motives and on the basis of different conceptions they had formed about it, these groups were not ideologically homogenous and hence inside the same group there were differences among individuals. The large size of the country made contact difficult and necessitated the adoption of different programmes and tactics.

A question may be raised as to the relationship between the emigre Communist Party of India and the

1. *Spratt: Opt. Cit., p. 33.*

2. *Communist International between fifth and sixth Congress, p. 473.*

3. *Fifth Congress of the C.I., p. 11.*

party formed inside India. The orthodox communist Muzaffar Ahmad maintains that the link between the two was a continuous one and that the Communist Party of India was the extended form of the Party organisation as set up abroad,¹ but Dange was only not so enthusiastic about it but he seemed to minimize the importance of the emigre unit of the Communist Party in relation to the Party constituted inside the country.²

In 1921 as a result of Roy's propoganda a conference of the representatives of the working class was convened by Shamsuddin Hassan and Gulam Hussain at Lahore with 'the object of organising a political party of the Indian working class.'³ Though the conference really never took place, yet Roy had submitted a Memorandum for it where in are found his views on the Indian situation and the tactics to be adopted by the would-be communist revolutionaries.

Roy's advice to the communists was that though they should not lose sight of the final goal of communism, namely, the end of class domination, and the establishment of a classless and stateless society and should relate any immediate programme of action to this final objective, yet the attainment of this final objective in India was intimately bound up with the question of national liberation, and therefore, any working class party worth the name must face and solve the problem of national liberation.⁴

They must adopt a programme which would rally the working class in the struggle against foreign domination. There were some communists in India who were looking only to the ultimate aim of all communists and were advocating the view that the question of national freedom was no concern of a working class party in India. Their plea was that the state of consciousness of the Indian

1. Muzaffar Ahmad, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 84.

2. *Interview with the author.*

3. A. K. Hindi: *M. N. Roy*, p. 101.

4. *Ibid*, pp. 122-24.

workers did not necessitate any such action and that any involvement in political struggle would necessarily bring the wrath of the Government on the party. They held that the aim of a working class party was merely to bring economic relief to the workers. According to Roy this was sheer reformism. Roy's advice to them was to organise the working classes on the basis of immediate grievances, and develop a strong revolutionary party, by leading them through a series of strikes and struggles for the enforcement of these immediate grievances, thus engendering into them class-consciousness and class solidarity.¹

This programme proceeded on the assumption that revolution in India was not going to be socialist but bourgeois-democratic in the first instance, and the whole strategy was to see that the leaders of this, if possible, should be the communist vanguards.² For this purpose they were to proceed with a minimum programme of 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution which the Indian National Congress was to be asked to adopt. In fact at this stage we find the communists making frantic appeals to the Indian National Congress to adopt a more revolutionary programme so as to receive enthusiastic support of the masses.

As early as the Ahmedabad session of the Congress (December, 1921) they succeeded in getting Maulana Hassat Mohani, a great Urdu poet and an ardent nationalist, to move a resolution advocating complete independence and opposing Dominion Status. This resolution was not accepted by the Congress. However, for moving this resolution the Maulana was tried in court and was sentenced to life-imprisonment, though the Bombay High Court later quashed this sentence. The Maulana was with the communists till 1927 when he had to leave the C.P.I. be-

1. *Ibid*, p. 125.

2. *See, Theses of the C.I., 1920, p. 15.*

cause the communists did not approve of his joining the Muslim League.

On the eve of the same Congress the communists issued a Manifesto to the Congress, signed by Roy and Abani Mukherjee but in the name of the C.P.I. wherein they maintained that non-co-operation could not succeed unless it were based on the immediate demands of the masses of the people. They maintained that the civil disobedience carried into practice would mean a national strike, and with this end in view the slogan should be : land to the peasant and bread to the worker. The Manifesto thus read : "If the Congress would lead the revolution, which is shaking India to the very foundation, let it not put faith in mere demonstration and temporary wild enthusiasm. Let it make the immediate demands of the Trade Unions its own demands, let it make the programme of Kisan Sabhas (Peasant Union) its own demand, and the time will soon come when the Congress will not stop before any obstacle : it will be backed by the irresistible strength of the entire population consciously fighting for their material interests."¹

From 1921 onwards they also started bringing 'labour problem' before the Indian National Congress which was asked to establish committees to organise the working class.² The Congress, however, never encouraged the workers to organise themselves in Trade Unions or into a political Party of their own.

In the Trade Union field the Communists started work on the basis of their conception of Trade Unions, in opposition to the official line of the All India Trade Union Congress. The Red International of Labour Unions formed in September, 1919 sent greetings to the Second session of the A.I.T.U.C. held at Jharia in 1921, and invited it 'to join

1. M. N. Roy : *One year of non-cooperation*, p. 22.

2. S. A. Dange : *On Indian Trade Union Movement*, p. 29.

in the great world movement of international solidarity on absolutely equal terms.¹ It is to be noted that this Congress passed a resolution of sympathy with the starving millions in Russia and urged workers to help Russia in every possible way.² In the meanwhile efforts were also being made towards the end of 1921 to send the Muhajirs back to India. After they had received further training at the University in Moscow they were sent back to India. Some came through the North-West frontier, others through the Pamirs. At first the idea was that two should travel together. Among those who came through the former route, choosing their own companions were: (a) Shaukat Usmani and Masood Ali Shah, (b) Mia Muhammad Akbar Shah and Gowher Rahman Khan. Towards the end of 1921 or early in 1922 both these groups succeeded in reaching India via Iran. They evaded arrest for some time, but later, they were arrested. Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah and Gawher Rahman Khan were tried in the Peshawar Communist Conspiracy case. Usmani was arrested at Cawnpore in May, 1923. As the Peshawar case was nearing completion, he was tried in the Cawnpore Conspiracy case. Masood returned back unnoticed to Moscow. Meer Abdul Mazeed and Firozuddin Mansoor could not find any clear route and returned to Moscow.³

It was then that the Pamir route was decided upon as an alternative. Towards the end of March, 1922 the following left on this errand: (1) Meer Abdul Mazeed, (2) Rafiq Ahmad, (3) Firozuddin Mansoor, (4) Habib Ahmad Naseem, (5) Sultan Mahmud, (6) Fida Ali Zahind, (7) Abdul Qadir Sehrai, (8) Sayeed, (9) Abdul Hamid, (10) Nizamuddin. All of them, except Sayeed, Hamid and Nizamuddin were members of the C.P.I.⁴ This group was

1. S. D. Punekar: *Trade Unionism in India*, p. 91.

2. M. Ahmad, *Ibid*, p. 91.

3. *Opt. cit.*, p. 34.

4. *Opt. cit.*, p. 35.

further divided into smaller groups. The following were in the first group: (1) Meer Abdul Mazeed, (2) Firozuddin Mansoor, (3) Habib Ahmad Naseem, and (4) Rafiq Ahmad. Fazle Ilahi and Abdulla Safdar were to have come with them but they did not.

After days of tortuous journeying the first group reached Chitral.

The police, however, succeeded in apprehending them, and they were sent, under arrest, to Peshawar. It was now easy for the police to apprehend and arrest others who followed.

All these arrested, whether they came via Pamir or via N.W.F., were tried in what later became famous as the Peshawar Communist Conspiracy Case (1922-23). Their trial was under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code which was an offence of conspiracy to 'deprive the King-Emperor of his sovereignty over India.' Although they had been arrested in 1922, their actual trial began early in 1923.

The accused were (1) Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah (resident of Nowshera, Peshawar), (2) Gawher Rahman Khan (of village Darbesh in Hazara District), (3) Meer Abdul Mazeed (of Lahore City), (4) Firozuddin Mansoor (of Sheikhpura Town), (5) Habib Ahmad Naseem (of Shah-jahanpur in U.P.), (6) Rafiq Ahmad (of Bhopal City), (7) Sultan Ahmad (of Haripur, Hazara district), (8) Abdul Qadir Sehrai (of Peshawar), (9) Fida Ali Zahid (of Peshawar), (10) Ghulam Muhammad (of Hazara district)

The accused nos. 1 to 9 were members of the emigre C.P.I. Ghulam Md. had long ago returned from Tashkent and was not a member of C.P.I. As already mentioned the first two had returned to India via N.W.F. early in 1922.

Among these Ghulam Mohammad and Fida Ali Zahid became approvers. In the sessions court their case was defended by Sir Abdul Qadir.

Judgment was given in the second week of May, 1923. The two approvers and Abdul Qadir Sehrai¹ were released. Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah and Gawher Rahman Khan were sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment, and the rest to a year's hard labour.

Previous to this case had been arrested and convicted Muhammad Akbar Khan and a companion of his. Khan was a Muhajir and had gone to Tashkent where he joined the military school, though he never joined the Communist Party. He had returned to India secretly in 1921 with the mandate to set up a printing press in the tribal area and arrange the production and distribution of leaflets and posters. He was arrested and prosecuted under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code, and was sentenced to three years' rigorous imprisonment. He was undergoing imprisonment when Rafiq and others were arrested and put in the same jail. From jail he managed to smuggle a letter for Sonali Dantwala (i.e. Md. Ali). He was tried second time and got seven years' sentence. His companion got a five years' term.

Meer Abdul Mazid, Firozuddin Mansoor and Gawher Rahman Khan were those among the prisoners of the Peshawar case who later actively participated in communist activity.

Towards the end of this period the C.I. also held a Congress of the Toilers of the East in January, 1922 with a view to co-ordinate awakening these oppressed peoples with the fighting proletariat of the world. The Congress endorsed the thesis of the Second Congress, and issued a manifesto to the Peoples of the East. This Congress, like the earlier one in Baku, was propagandist in nature.

Conclusion :

Leftism originated in India after the World War One on the fertile soil prepared by the new forces. During this period the political scene was dominated by the Indian

1. He later wrote his reminiscences in the "Times" of London.

National Congress. Under the influence of the British Labour Movement, successful trade unions were formed, yet the logical corollary of an Indian Labour Party could not materialise. The International Communist Movement, stemming from the impact of the Russian Revolution, succeeded in establishing communist groups by 1921-22, though communism in India still existed on the level of ideas only.

From this two vital factors emerge which provide the dual background to the origin, growth and development of communism in India. The one is the inspiration, guidance and support provided by the Communist International; and the other is the background provided by the national movement as embodied in the Indian National Congress.

Communist movements in South and South-East Asia arose against the background of nationalist movements, and the strength of communism has depended on the extent they have made their movement instrumental in the realization of national aspiration. In respect of Indian communists too there was evolution of their programme with their relation with the Congress and vice versa.

From these initial considerations a great limiting factor upon the development of communist activity in India began. Roy and others of the C.I. were away from the scene and not always in touch with the developing situation. Their advice often bore stamp of unreality. Moreover, they seldom worked in close collaboration with one another. Mutual jealousies, lust for power and money, differences of temperament and outlook remained inhibiting factors for long.

Moreover, direction and guidance from the Communist International were only of spasmodic nature in early years, thus giving rise to differences of opinion and interpretation.

CHAPTER THREE

Growth of Communism and Militant Trade Unionism (March, 1922-March, 1929)

The year 1922-23 marked the beginning of a definite swing in the so far ambivalent Indian communism. From a collection of groups constituting an ideological centre, it began to organise itself as a movement. On February 12, 1922 the non-violent non-co-operation started under the Gandhian leadership was withdrawn, after the peasants of Chauri Chaura (in U.P.) had attacked and killed 21 policemen. To Mahatma Gandhi this outburst of violence was a revelation that shocked and surprised him. He admitted his 'Himalayan blunder', and seeing in it the voice of God, he withdrew the whole movement. His action was formally approved by the Working Committee of the National Congress meeting at Bardoli on the 12th February, 1922. The suspension of the non-co-operation angered Roy, who in a manifesto, issued on July 15, 1922 denounced it as a 'veritable betrayal of the revolutionary rank and file by the non-revolutionary and reactionary leadership'¹

The withdrawal of the movement marked the emergence of certain distinct tendencies. For nearly three years the Mahatma had kept the people in a forlorn world of his followers to the realization of that end. However, year', and had geared the thought, emotions and actions of expectancy by his magic formula of 'swaraj within one

1. M. N. Roy & Evelyn Roy : *One year of non-cooperation*, p. 60.

that had failed to materialise and now, to the great dismay and surprise of many of his followers, he withdrew the movement.

The withdrawal of the movement witnessed the disintegration of the heterogeneous social and political elements that had constituted it. There were, for example, the young people, those terrorists and revolutionaries of pre-war years, who had veered round the Gandhian movement as it offered them a method of direct action, but with that basis now gone, many of them again reverted to their old techniques. The ensuing years saw a recrudescence of their activity in a more virulent form. Some of them, on the other hand, also started groping their way towards Marxism and Socialism.¹

The elements comprising what we may term the upper middle class progressives who had never been in ideological sympathy with Gandhi's methods, turned towards a constitutional approach and under the leadership of C. R. Das later founded the Swaraj Party.² This trend towards constitutionalism, along with other factors, gave encouragement to communal elements in the country to raise their heads, and poison the atmosphere.³

There also sprang up a left-wing inside the Indian National Congress critical of the dominant leadership, because they disagreed with certain aspects of the programme and tactics adopted by the Congress. It took as its starting point the withdrawal of the movement which, according to it, was not justified. It later became vocal under the unproclaimed leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru,

1. *We shall deal with them in Chapter Five.*
2. *Indian Annual Register, 1923, Vol. I, p. 834, & Vol. II, p. 143. We can't here deal with the origin, growth and the programme of the Swaraj Party but it has always to be kept in the background of the communist activity of this period. For this see, P. Sitaramayya: History of the Congress, Vol. I, pp. 428-50.*
3. *J. Nehru: Autobiography, p. 86. We shall deal in detail with this phenomenon when we later turn to the socialist handling of Pakistan and National unity.*

Subhas Chandra Bose, Iyengar, etc., and did much to popularise socialism and to create an atmosphere which led to the founding of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934.¹

The peasantry—the main driving force behind the movement—had been left in the lurch. As observed earlier, they were drawn to Non-cooperation on their own economic demands and expected Swaraj at long last to bring an end to their misery. Since their economic grievances remained, the peasant movements continued even after the withdrawal of the Non-cooperation. In fact a sort of scepticism came over both the peasants and their leaders who started independent class organisations of Kisans (Peasants).²

Lastly among the effects was a new orientation in the communist strategy and tactics, which became clearly discernible both in the trade union field and in the general political field. In both these fields the communists started work on independent lines. Attempts were made to organise trade unions on the basis of the tactics of revolutionary class-struggle. The existing leadership of the trade unions was dubbed as 'moderate' and 'reformist' and strenuous efforts were made to capture the leadership of these trade unions. In the political field, similarly, a beginning was made to establish strong nuclei of communist activity. Various attempts were made between 1922 and 1929 to create some organ of political mass action in which the communists could exercise the hegemony of the proletariat.

These two lines of communist activity were not pursued separately; on the contrary they were integrally related and were conducted by the same personnel belonging to the communist movement. It is only for the sake of clarity that we shall treat them separately.

1. We shall deal with them in Chapter V and Chapter VI.

2. See, Chapter V for detail.

Communists and the Trade Unions

Communist work in the trade unions had hitherto been only nominal. Though a few young communists like Dange, Chettiar, etc., were present at the very first session of the All India Trade Union Congress, the communist activity as such was not discernible. There were many reasons for this. The first phase of the growth of the Labour Movement (1919-22) was bound up with the general growth of the nationalist movement and was marked by the subordination of the interests of the working class to the interests of the Nationalist Movement. Though the Trade Unions as such were never committed to the nationalist struggles started by the Indian National Congress, yet a few nationalist leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Dewan Chaman Lal, V. V. Giri and others regarded the trade unions as second fiddle to the nationalist movement. In practice, however, they did not go to the extent of calling for a general political strike of the workers. This leadership, as we have noted, believed essentially in peaceful methods, but they would on occasions resort to the expression of militant phraseology from the trade union platform consonant with the feelings and language of nationalism. Carried on the wave of enthusiasm created by the political movement, a certain number of political strikes occurred during the strike-wave that swept the country (1919-21) and which in the main was driven by economic grounds. In fact this was a period of spontaneous militancy in the working class movement.

Secondly, it needs to be emphasised that the communists were still but a handful in number and not yet clear about the form their own activity should take. The communist line of work among the trade unions became discernible from 1923 in the utterances of the communists and resolutions of communist gatherings, national and international. The Fourth Congress of the Communist International (1922) sent a telegram to the Lahore Session

of the A.I.T.U.C. asking it not to restrict the working class movement to fighting only for "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work" and added : "The economic emancipation of the peasants and workers depends upon the political liberty of the nation."¹ Another document of this period advised similarly : "the Indian Communist Party must bring the trade union movement under its influence. It must organise it on a class basis and purge it of all alien elements."²

In accordance with these resolutions of International Communism, M. N. Roy advised : "The task before the Trade Union Congress is not reform but revolution. It is not conservative trade unionism based upon bankrupt theory of 'collective bargaining', but revolutionary mass action involving the pauperised peasantry as well as the city and rural wage earners and led by those who want to see that India enter upon a period of social progress. The Trade Union Congress must free itself from the leadership which believes in piece-meal reform."³

The basic features of this new Trade Unionism which thus emerged and which were inculcated among the labouring masses were the following :

Labour was to be organised on the basis of revolutionary class-struggle, instead of on the basis of class-reconciliation, and harmony between labour and capital as was the official line of the A.I.T.U.C. The awakening and sharpening of the class-consciousness of workers was to be resorted to for this purpose.⁴

Two ideals, one immediate and the other ultimate, were to be put forward before workers : The ultimate aim of labour was to be nothing less than the establishment of socialism or communism and in the achievement of this goal labour was to be the leading force. The immediate

1. *Resolutions and Theses of the Fourth Congress of the C.I.*, p. 15.
2. *See, From Fourth to Fifth World Congress, Report on India.*
3. *M. N. Roy : Political Letters*, pp. 19-20.
4. *B. F. Bradley : Trade Unionism in India*, pp. 30.40.

concern of labour was the amelioration of the immediate economic grievances, for the attainment of which persistent struggles were to be waged by the workers, with frequent use of the strike weapon. Thus Roy wrote : "Our object is the economic freedom of the producing classes. This ultimate goal will be attained after a long and bitter struggle. Therefore our primary task is to organise the masses and lead them in the struggle for economic freedom."¹

It was also held that neither of these aims, whether immediate or ultimate, were capable of being realised under the existing conditions, and without national freedom. Therefore, it was held that Indian working class could not be indifferent to the political struggle for national independence. Thus unlike the official line of the A.I.T.U.C. which tried to keep the Trade Unions out of the quagmire of nationalist politics and confined them to the aim of the economic betterment, the communists refused to keep the working class aloof from political question. The Trade Unions were to be weaned away from the official leadership, and thus got rid of 'alien' influence, they were to be made 'truly workers' organisations.' Thus Ben Bradley of the British Communist Party, who joined the Indian communists during this period, wrote : "We felt that if the workers' position was to be improved and a sound Trade Union Movement built up, it was essential to attack and overthrow the leadership of the reformists in the Trade Unions."² Activities in accordance with this line were to be carried on from the platform of the A.I.T.U.C., and the new trade unions under communist domination were to be affiliated to the A.I.T.U.C., thus ultimately ensuring that the militant section would be in majority in that body. The carrying out of such trade union activity was not easy at the time. Apart from the backwardness and

1. M. N. Roy : *Political Letters*, p. 32.

2. See, B. F. Bradley : *Trade Unionism in India*, p. 13.

other weaknesses of the Indian labour already noted, it was precisely at this time that, apart from general stabilisation of capitalism all over the world after the dislocations of the War period and a recession in the political tempo of the country, a decline in the trade union spirit had set in, consequent upon disappointment and demoralisation among the workers after the great strike-waves (1918-22), a majority of which failed to bring about any appreciable improvement in their conditions of work.

This period of reaction lasted till 1926, and is evidenced by a continuous decrease, both in the number of strikes and the number of workers involved, between 1922-26. The table below gives the figure yearwise.¹

| Year | No. of strikes | No. of workers involved |
|------|----------------|-------------------------|
| 1922 | 278 | 435,434 |
| 1923 | 213 | 301,044 |
| 1924 | 133 | 312,462 |
| 1925 | 134 | 270,423 |
| 1926 | 128 | 186,811 |

This is not to maintain that there was complete apathy among the workers. As a matter of fact during the period 1922-26 a number of strikes, mostly spontaneous but well-organised and having greater staying power, occurred in a number of places over wage-cuts and other immediate grievances like retrenchment and rationalisation. Prominent among these were : In 1923 the big strike, involving 45,000 workers and lasting for two months, among the Ahmedabad textile workers; in 1924 the general strike of the Bombay textile workers which lasted for three months and involved 160,000 workers; in 1925 a general strike among the Bombay textile workers over wage cuts, the Bombay Textile Labour Union having been born as a result in January, 1926; in 1926 strikes among the textile workers in Bombay, Indore and Mysore.

1. *Industrial Labour in India, 1938, p. 138.*

Despite a lull in the mass action the stir among the peasants also remained at places. The Akali movement continued till the end of 1922. The peasant movement in U.P. also continued, as also that in Malabar. In Bengal there was a no-tax movement during the summer of 1922 at a number of places. But on the whole there was a relative calm among the peasant masses till 1927-28 when a fresh awakening dawned upon them consequent upon the rapidly rising nationalist tone. The peasant movement in Bardoli (1928) was the most significant peasant movement of the period.

Notwithstanding this general depression, the communists started their work along the new lines during this unfavourable period, and in this they were aided and stimulated by the emigre Indians trained at Tashkent and Moscow in the strategy and tactics of revolutionary trade unionism and communism, as well as by other communists belonging to International Communism who sought to inspire action through letters, propaganda in the form of booklets and pamphlets, messages, appeals, financial aid etc.

Though most of the Moscow trained Muhajirs who had tried to enter the country through the north-western land route during 1921-22 were arrested and convicted for varying terms of imprisonment, in the Peshawar Communist Conspiracy Case (1922-23) mentioned earlier, but a few like Usmani successfully evaded the police and established contacts with local communists. Usmani reached the country towards the end of 1921 and remained free till May, 1923 and during this period contacted a number of local communists. Courier Nalini Gupta left the country in April, 1922 and came back again in 1923. He could be arrested only towards the end of the year. The British communist Charles Ashleigh reached Bombay in September 1922 as an emissary of the C.P.G.B., and was arrested but during the interval of the completion of deportation proceedings he contacted a few Bombay com-

munists and delivered messages. Abani Mukherjee who had come in 1922 returned to Europe only in March, 1924.¹ R. C. L. Sharma of Pondicherry was in touch with Roy, and was a convenient diverting route for messages. In April, 1922 Roy shifted to Berlin and started a bi-monthly paper called *The Vanguard of Indian Independence*. It continued publication under varying names, from Zurich as *The Vanguard* and later from Paris as the *Masses of India*. His first major work on India, *India in Transition*, which interpreted the Indian scene from Marxist angle, was published from Berlin. Its English edition appeared during the summer of 1922 and was immediately smuggled to India.²

The cumulative effect of all these was to introduce a new spirit and to give a fresh impetus to the movement. This became faintly discernible in the strikes and struggles of 1922-23 when the communists came forward with the slogan of labour as the sole creator of value and with other slogans of a socialist outlook in which there were revolutionary demands for national freedom.³ For the first time communism came to be preached openly. It was in consonance with this spirit that for the first time in the country there appeared from Bombay a socialist weekly paper in English called 'The Socialist' in August, 1922 under the editorship of S. A. Dange. The paper introduced a Left-wing viewpoint into India. Navayug in Calcutta, Urdu Inquilab from Lahore, Kirti in the Punjab, Langal and Ganavani in Bengal, Spark, Kranti, and New Spark in Bombay were the other notable papers having Left-wing viewpoints.

However, despite these efforts and stimulations, the communists could not make any headway in the trade

1. M. Ahmad, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 142.

2. Among the writings of Roy of this period are: 1. *What do we want (1922)?* 2. *Political Letters, 1924*, 3. *Future of Indian Politics*. 4. *Aftermath of non-cooperation*. 5. *One year of non-cooperation etc.*

3. "Dange, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 31.

union field during 1923-24 and this was largely due to the severe, almost paralysing blow their movement received at the hands of the Government in the form of two conspiracy cases; first the Peshawar Conspiracy Case in which, as already noted, judgement was delivered in May, 1923 and which removed for some time from the scene a potentially powerful group of agitators; and the other the Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy Case (1924).

Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy Case (1924)

Since trade unionism still attracted only a small portion of public attention, communist activities went almost unnoticed, but for the Cawnpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case against the following communists and their associates : S. A. Dange, Shaukat Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmad, Nalini Gupta, Ghulam Husain, Singaravelu Chettiar, Ramcharan Lal Sharma and M. N. Roy. Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmad and Ghulam Husain had been arrested in May, 1923 and kept without trial under Regulation III of 1818. Gupta was arrested in December, 1923 and was similarly kept under detention. Dange was arrested early in 1924. In March, 1924 they were all charge-sheeted in the court of the District Magistrate, Cawnpur, on behalf of the Government of India under Section 121—A of the Indian Penal Code, the plaintiff being Col. C. Kaye, Director of the Central Intelligence Bureau. Cawnpur was chosen as the place for launching a conspiracy case because U.P. in general and Cawnpur in particular was the main field of activity of Usmani, the Moscow trained communist, who had secretly entered the country along with Masood Ali Shah.

In fact the main motives behind the case were : (a) to entangle International Communism and thereby frighten the Soviet Government from giving encouragement and help to the Indian revolutionaries, the repeated protest notes from the British Government in the past having

failed to bring the desired result; (b) to terrorise the local communists and their would-be supporters and sympathisers and (c) to strangle the communist danger in its very infancy so that it might not constitute any real danger to the industrial life of the country.

The trial began in April, 1924 and concluded in May, 1924. Ghulam Husain confessed and secured freedom; Chettiar was ill; R. C. L. Sharma and M. N. Roy were abroad. The four remaining accused were charged with conspiracy "to wage war against the King-Emperor by means of a violent revolution".¹ It was alleged that the Communist International, which had a revolutionary aim, was determined to establish its branch in India; that for this purpose it had directed M. N. Roy to establish a Communist Party in India; that Roy and other accused persons communicated with each other and entered into a conspiracy to establish a branch in India. It was further alleged that Roy consistently preached the doctrine that India could never secure freedom except by violent means and that to be a non-violent revolutionary was like a vegetarian tiger. Roy was further charged to have advocated mass action that would develop into organised agrarian strikes, food riots and peasant revolts, spreading like wild fire from one end of the country to another.²

All the accused denied the charges and professed they did not hold the view attributed to them. Dange in particular declared that he differed with Roy on some fundamentals like the use of violence etc. He admitted that he corresponded with Roy but merely for the purpose of getting material for his study (book) and his journalistic writings. The accused claimed the right which had been accorded to communists in other parts of the Empire, especially in Great Britain—the right to preach socialism.

1. *The Indian Annual Register*, 1924, p. XVIII.

2. *Summary of charges taken from the Indian Annual Register*, 1924, Vol. I, p. XVIII.

They averred they had done nothing more than that.¹ They went up to the Sessions Court in due course. The judge, Mr. H. L. Home, notorious in the Chauri Chaura case, however, confirmed the existence of a conspiracy and sentenced each of them to four years' imprisonment.

The case aroused considerable interest both in India and abroad, since some people interpreted this as an act of the authorities to stop preaching of socialism itself. Many labour and trade union leaders in Great Britain led by George Lansbury tried to raise agitation in England on this issue. The significance of the case not only lay in the fact that for sometime it crippled the communist movement but its reverberations could be felt much later when in the spring of 1964 on the basis of some archival material it was alleged that in 1924 Dange had written a letter to the then Viceroy offering his services to the Government in exchange for his early release from prison. Though Dange denied the genuineness of this letter it became a bone of contention between the Left and Right communist factions in the C.P.I., leading to a split.

Increase of Communist Activity in the Trade Unions.

The Cawnpur conspiracy case slackened communist activity for a while but there was a resurgence from 1925-26 in a more virulent and militant form. Undaunted by the trial the communists made a bold attempt to capture the trade unions and to convert them into mass trade unions under a working class leadership "close to the workers in the factories, guided by the principles of class struggle and operating as a single force in the economic and political field."² The passage of the Trade Union Act of 1926 was favourable to the communist activity in as much as for the first time the organisation of trade unions and resort to strike actions were legalised so far as registered

1. *The Socialist*, 24.11.24.
2. *Dange, Opt. Cit.*, p. 34.

unions were concerned, though there were restrictions on the political activity of the workers.

By 1925 most of the convicts in the Peshawar Conspiracy case were released. After release Meer Abdul Mazeed, assisted by Gawher Rahman Khan, Firozuddin Mansoor and Habib Ahmad Naseem, resumed work at Lahore cut short by Gulam Husain having severed his connections with the Party. Abdul Mazeed was released in 1924 and started work immediately thereafter.

The work in the Punjab also got impetus from the Ghadar Party leader Santokh Singh, a born revolutionary and a tireless organiser, who came to India via Moscow in 1925. By 1924 the Ghadar Party in America had come under the influence of the Communist International and started sending delegates to the Soviet Union for being trained in communism. After training they came to India and laid the foundation of the communist movement in India. This became particularly evident from 1927 onwards.

Towards the end of 1925 the Muhajir Fazle Ilahi Qurban, a trusted lieutenant of M. N. Roy, also came back. He could be arrested only in April, 1927 and sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment, but in the meanwhile he contacted many Party leaders.

Muzaffar Ahmad was released on grounds of health in September, 1925 and with him at the scene, the Calcutta group became once again active.

Though Dange could be released only early in 1927 but in his absence the Bombay communists S. V. Ghatge, K. N. Joglekar and R. S. Nimbkar kept the flag flying. In Cawnpur Hasrat Mohani and others were doing their bit of work. In Madras Chettiar was still the flickering hope of Indian communism.

The local communists were reinforced by the arrival of a number of foreign communists between 1925-28. Some of them, like Allison, Spratt and Bradley, were zealous

communist revolutionaries, and able organisers and they imparted a new spirit to the movement.

To be sure these foreign communists were sent partly in pursuance of a new orientation in relation to India in the policy of the Communist International dating back from 1924 for the purpose of establishing direct contact with the communist groups and organisations in India. Direct contact, however, was not possible and the Communist Party of Great Britain became the organisational link which from then onwards increasingly took upon itself the task of communising the Empire. This change, no doubt, meant an implied criticism of Roy and his method, though the channel through Roy also continued simultaneously.

The first foreign communist to be sent to India was P. E. Glading, an engineering worker in London, who arrived early in 1925 but left India soon without making any contacts.

In April, 1926 he was followed by George Allison alias Donald Campbell, a Scottish coal miner, who had spent some time in Moscow. He was sent direct by the Red International of Labour Unions and was charged with the task of organising a radical left-wing inside the Trade Union Congress which was itself to be converted into an organ of revolutionary trade unionism, but was asked to keep out of Party politics. An attractive personality, he was aggressively proletarian and contemptuous of middle-class communists and trade unionists. In January, 1927 Allison was arrested on the charge of entering India on a forged passport. He was given eighteen months' imprisonment and was deported at the expiry of the term in May, 1928.

Philip Spratt, an Oxford graduate, arrived on 31st December, 1926. His job, he himself maintained later, was that of a messenger and reporter.¹ His principal

1. P. Spratt: *Blowing up India*, p. 29.

message was that the C.P.I. should launch a Workers' and Peasants' Party as a legal cover, and that the Party members should get into the trade unions and capture their leadership. A man of superb organisational skill, he was later convicted in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, but broke off with the communists afterwards, relating his experiences and views in 'India and Communism' and 'Blowing up India.'

Early in 1927 Saklatvala, the communist M.P. and Mardy Jones came to India as representatives of the Workers' Welfare League of India, London. Saklatvala was born in Bombay in 1874 and went to London in 1905 and found his way in the labour movement. He was Indian Secretary of the League.

Ben Bradley arrived in September, 1927 and L. H. Hutchinson in September, 1928. Bradley was an engineering worker and a member of the Amalgamated Engineering Union.

Apart from their concept of revolutionary trade unionism based upon the uncompromising theory of class struggle, the communists focussed a number of prominent issues from the trade union platform: The inseparability of the working class struggle from the struggle for political emancipation; need for a working class party; leadership or at least hegemony of the proletariat in the national movement; struggle in respect of a definition of the political goal of freedom to mean complete independence; alliance with the peasant masses and their struggles; persistent use of strike weapon, overthrow of reformist trade union leadership; affiliation of the Trade Union Congress with R.I.L.U. and League against Imperialism and relations with the Pan-Pacific Trade Union secretariat; protests and demonstrations against Simon Commission, Whitley Commission, and Trade Disputes Act, and dangers of a new capitalist war against the U.S.S.R.; expression of friendship with Soviet Union and China; criticism of Nehru Report; struggle against I.L.O. and the I.F.T.U., Labour

Swaraj and Labour Constitution etc; carried in the wake of the ever-rising tone of nationalism from 1927 onwards. Some of these did not fail to attract support.

The workers themselves had passed over the phase of demoralisation, and hard pressed by their miserable economic conditions, they again took to strike action. Activity among the workers increased by leaps and bounds. Trade Union organisations shot up. A great wave of working class unrest rolled over the country and socialist slogans began to appear. In 1925 the communists found an important leader in D. R. Thengdi of Nagpur in the trade union field. Thengdi became president of the Bombay A.I.T.U.C. in February, 1925 and in his Presidential address he advocated nation-wide strikes. He urged labour not to be apolitical but the consensus at this Congress was that individual workers should be free to join whatever political party they liked.¹ He was the first man in the country to have introduced the concept of class-struggle from the trade union platform. He also urged representation of labour in the legislature on the basis of adult suffrage. He also wanted labour to develop an international outlook. The Workers' Welfare League of India, London, which in 1924 had been appointed representative of the A.I.T.U.C. in England, sent greetings to this Congress.

The First of May was for the first time celebrated at Lahore in 1927. The slogan 'Long live the Red Flag' replaced that of 'Bande Mataram' (Hail Motherland) which was the slogan of the Indian National Congress. In May, 1927 was started a highly revolutionary paper called *Kranti* (Revolution), and while it shortly ceased publication, it was again revived in 1928.² A few other papers were published in the vernaculars.

The membership of the trade unions increased by great strides and a new wave of strike overtook the coun-

1. *Report of A.I.T.U.C., 1925.*

2. *Ahmad Mukhtar: Trade Unionism and Labour Disputes in India, p. 213.*

try. Trade union membership in Bombay which in three years (1923-26) had only advanced from 44,669 to 59,544 reached 75,602 by 1927, rose to 95,321 by March, 1928 and to 200,325 by March, 1929. In 1927 in India as a whole there were 11 registered unions with 45,253 members, in 1928 there were 30 with 152,061 members : in 1929 the number rose to 42 unions with 153,483 members.¹ The following table gives us an idea of the steady rise in the number of registered and unregistered unions and their membership for the country as a whole, between 1927 and 1929 :

| Year | No. of Unions | Member-ship | Registered Unions | |
|------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|------------|
| | | | No. | Membership |
| 1927 | 72 | 87,340 | 11 | 45,253 |
| 1928 | 94 | 198,072 | 30 | 152,061 |
| 1929 | 99 | 196,748 | 42 | 153,463 |

[From *Industrial Labour in India : Studies and Reports of I.L.O.*, 1938, p. 126].

The year 1928 also witnessed the greatest tide of the working class advance and activity of any year of the post-war period. The working days lost in the year totalled 31,647,404, that is, more than in the previous five years taken together. The number of strikes in 1928 was almost double of that in 1926. The chief centre of the strikes were the Bombay textile workers, whose strike lasted for full six months, from April to October, 1928. It was indeed one of the greatest strikes of Indian history involving 150,000 workers.² The strike, no doubt, gave expression to the prevailing industrial unrest and discontent among the workers over wage cuts, unemployment and rationalisation. It was in connection with this strike, over its desirability or otherwise that a controversy rose between the communists and other officials of the Trade Union Congress like N. M. Joshi. Indeed the Bombay Textile Labour Union did not take active part in the strike. In May, 1927 the

1. *I. L. O. Reports : Industrial Labour in India*, p. 126.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

communists then started a rival trade union organisation of textile workers of Bombay called Girni Kamgar Union but known as Red Flag Union among the workers. It was the first purely Left-wing trade union in India. It started with a membership of 384, but the membership soon rose to 54,000 by December, 1928 and by the first-quarter of 1929 it had reached 65,000.¹

The strikes were not confined to Bombay alone. Out of 203 disputes all over the country in 1928, 111 were in Bombay, 8 in Behar and Orissa, 7 in Madras and 2 in the Punjab. Among the strikes at other places and in other industries were: Bengal Jute, the E. I. Railway, S. I. Railway; Sholapur, Nagpur, Cawnpur and Madras textiles; steel workers, Jamshedpur; Calcutta Dock workers etc. The strikes also got associated with the resurgence of the nationalist movement from 1927 onwards and rose to a new pitch with the arrival of the Simon Commission in February, 1928. What is noteworthy about these strikes, originating as the bulk of them did from grievances of an economic character, was the attempt to establish trade unions on the principle of Marxism and the concept of class struggle. The paper *Kranti*, for example, always instilled Marxian phraseology among the workers. When the General Strike of Bombay Textile workers ended on October 5, 1928 the *Kranti* of 13th October contained the following leader: "Remember that the strike is not ended but it is only suspended. Although we go to the Mills, we do so boiling with rage. There is no peace until capitalism is overthrown."² Another of its issues contained the following on the trial and conviction of the accused workers in connection with the murder of one, Mr. Daver, a mill official: "If a man excited by the fire of joolom (injustice) were to do any unlawful act, then he is not responsible for it, but capitalism which does this joolom and brings mountains of unhappiness should be hanged.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 385.

2. Quoted by Ahmad Mukhtar in *Trade Unionism and Labour Disputes in India*, p. 215.

But how can capitalism be hanged by the Court of the capitalists? The law throughout the world is the law of capitalism. The workman can't be happy unless and until capitalism is killed and the ownership of factories and agriculture is in the hands of labour".¹ Similar views were also expressed in another paper *Spark*, started during this period under the editorship of M. G. Desai. It stopped publication for a while but reappeared as *New Spark* under L. H. Hutchinson. Spratt and Bradley also sometimes gave encouragement to violence, though Dange held the opposite view that under the existing circumstances in India constitutional method was appropriate. In a speech in April, 1927, reported by the *National Herald* (25th April, 1927), Spratt said : The embers of mass discontent are lying dormant beneath the structure of Indian society and biding their time to blaze forth into a mighty conflagration. Revolution of a dual character—social and political—is in store for India. To make it successful the workers and the peasants need to be arrayed under the banner of communism, and organised under the lines of trade union. In September, 1927 Spratt was prosecuted under Section 124A, I.P.C., for his booklet 'India and China' but was acquitted in November, 1927.

Added to these revolutionary ideas of class struggle was an attempt to instil into the workers a sense of internationalism. In 1927 for the first time the question of international solidarity of labour was brought before the Indian workers by publicising the trial in America of Sacco and Vanzetti, and the efforts being made to secure their acquittal. The expression of friendship with the Soviet Union and China also became a theme at this time and they asked the workers to support the 'Hands off China' movement.

Important changes were clearly taking place in the Indian Labour Movement. The rising tone of militant

1. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

trade unionism, the strike wave with its accompanying slogans of class war, socialism and labour internationalism were imparting a new international significance to the whole movement. The two post-war impacts upon the Labour Movement, the one coming from the British Labour Party and the other from International Communism, that had for several years existed side by side now seemed to be coming into a headlong clash. The outcome of the conflict was not simply of significance for India alone—its implications were international in extent and that precisely was whether the Indian Labour was to ally itself with the British Labour Party and through it, in the international labour field, with the International Federation of Trade Unions and the Socialist International (Amsterdam) or it was to ally itself with International Communism and with the Red International of Labour Unions and the Third Communist International, Moscow.

The growing importance of the international aspect of the situation is evidenced by the fact that at this stage both the British Labour Leaders (more precisely the B.T.U.C.) and the International Communists sent a strong contingent of their representatives to India to impress upon the Indian Labour their respective ideals with a view to win it to their side. Among the British Labour leaders who visited India at this stage were Fenner Brockway, A. A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth. The latter two attended the Cawnpur Session of the A.I.T.U.C. and on their return published a Report on Labour Conditions in India which gave a graphic account of the conditions of Indian Labour : 'It is doubtful whether there is any parallel case in the world today, at least in any country comparable with India. That such a state of affairs should exist in the 20th Century after 150 years of British rule is a serious reflection upon everybody concerned'.¹ The Communist emissaries have already been mentioned.

1. A. A. Purcell & J. Hallsworth : *Report on Labour conditions in India*, p. 6.

Along with these emissaries, a vast amount of communist literature was smuggled into India. As we have already pointed out, the chief difficulty of the young Indian communists had been their lack of clarity on Marxism and communism, due to a dearth of literature on the subject and frequent attempts were made to send such material. The Government's usual method to stem this flow of communist literature had been to act under Section 19 of the Sea Customs Act. In May, 1927, however, the Government of India, framed a notification, prohibiting the import into India of any publication or document issued by, or emanating from the Communist International or any organisation affiliated to or connected with it.

The echo of this rivalry for dominance over the trade unions could actually be heard at the Madras Session of the A.I.T.U.C. in January, 1926. Major Graham Pole of the British Labour Party personally delivered messages from the British Trade Union Congress and the I.F.T.U. The C.P.G.B., the R.I.L.U. and the U.S.S.R. Council of Trade Unions sent their greetings and expressed satisfaction over having established direct contact with India, and hoped for closer relations in future for serving vital common ends.

The struggle over International affiliation assumed great importance and was intensified with the presence of these foreign labour representatives. Thus in a lengthy message to the 8th Session of the A.I.T.U.C. held at Cawnpur in November, 1927, under the presidentship of Dewan Chaman Lal the Red International of Labour Unions, while emphasizing the necessity of class-conscious, political and economic struggle against oppressors, asked the Indian trade unions to remember the distinction between R.I.L.U. and Amsterdam International. The message concluded : "The Executive Bureau of R.I.L.U. is profoundly convinced that the trade unions of India will be able to determine who are the enemies and who are the friends of the exploited classes, and oppressed peoples,

that the working classes of India will march shoulder to shoulder with those who have placed upon their banner the unity of the world trade union movement." The main aim of the Communists was to connect the A.I.T.U.C. with the International Trade Union Movement, through the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat.

Apart from the R.I.L.U., this Congress received greetings from the C.P.G.B., and the League against Imperialism. The League appreciated opposition to the Simon Commission, deplored Labour Party's participation in it and called upon the workers to take a leading part in the national and social emancipation movements.¹ The I.F.T.U., in its greetings, similarly expressed for affiliation. The British Labour Group and their supporters in India, the Joshi-Giri group of trade union officials, desired the affiliation of A.I.T.U.C. to I.F.T.U. Speaking at the above mentioned annual Session of the A.I.T.U.C. Purcell, the fraternal delegate from the B.T.U.C., said, "It is the business of our delegation, it is our duty—a duty we are highly honoured and deeply grateful to perform—to do whatever is possible to relate, to link up, to coordinate this trade union movement with the B.T.U. Movement."²

The question of International affiliation suddenly came into prominence in 1927 because the Chinese movement had affiliated to the R.I.L.U. It was in anticipation of this struggle that the Joshi-Giri group first brought forward a proposal at Cawnpur (1927) for affiliation of the A.I.T.U.C. to the I.F.T.U. The communists, however, exercised a strong influence over the trade unions, and this, together with the fact that there was a body of neutral trade unionists who did not favour affiliation to any of the Internationals, led to the defeat of this proposal.

The question of international affiliation, however, did not lose importance and at the Delhi meeting of the

1. *Report of the 8th session of A.I.T.U.C., 1927.*

2. *Report of 8th Session of A.I.T.U.C., Cawnpur, 1927.*

Executive of the A.I.T.U.C. in 1928 the communists made a counter-proposal to affiliate to the Red International of Labour Unions. After a good deal of skirmishes both the groups dropped the idea of international affiliation for the time being.¹

It was clear that what was at stake, and underlying this international controversy was the fundamental question as to which of the two conflicting principles was to form the basis of the trade union organisation and policy in India. The official policy so far pursued was that the business of trade unions was to champion and defend the economic interests of the working class by collective bargaining, and it was for this that the unity and solidarity of workers was essential. In this view of things there was no place for class-struggle.² The interests of Labour and Capital were not irreconcilable and "the task of industrial statesmanship is to try to reconcile what appears on the surface to be a conflict of interests."³

But the view of the Marxists was based on an altogether different conception that class-struggle is the inevitable phenomenon under capitalism and there is no turning away from it. Therefore, trade unions ought to be based on the principle of class-struggle. Moreover, this struggle of the working class was not confined to mere economic interests of workers but was and must be extended to whole field of social, economic and political life.⁴ "Trade Unions are not only the focal points for the organisation of the working class, they are even more important as organised bodies to promote the abolition of the very system of wage labour.⁵ Therefore, Trade Unions are not neutral, on the contrary they must be social and political. It was this conception of trade unions that the

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1927, Vol. II, p. 119.

2. For detailed analysis of this official line, see, Chapter II.

3. *Lincoln Evans on British Labour Party*, Vol. II, p. 87, 1948.

4. See, *Marx Engels Correspondence*, p. 25.

5. See, A. Lozovsky: *Marx and the Trade Unions*, p. 16.

communists were trying to inculcate into the working class.

In the light of these two conceptions the resolutions and deliberations of the Cawnpur session of the A.I.T.U.C. are most important. The communists made considerable headway. They succeeded in getting discussed and resolutions passed, on such topics as Imperialism, threat of war to the U.S.S.R., League against Imperialism, Colonial oppression, the Simon Commission etc. The political resolution on the Simon Commission expressed opposition to its appointment on the ground that it violated the principle of self-determination.¹ The resolution declared for its boycott and requested the British Labour Party to withdraw its representatives from the Commission. The resolution also declared that, in the meanwhile a Sub-Committee of the T.U.C. should draw up a Labour Constitution for the future Government of India, which should be presented to the Executive Council and to the working classes in the country.

Another resolution, drawing lessons from experiences of China, declared that "national bourgeoisie will surely betray the struggle for national independence". It further maintained that the aim of Trade Unions should be to prepare workers for leadership of the national struggle and for this purpose it resolved to appoint a "Council of Action", realising the urgency of organising a mass movement of workers and peasants.

Viewed in this atmosphere of rivalry for gaining control of the A.I.T.U.C., the 9th Annual Session held at Jharia in December, 1928 was very important. The session was being attended by Johnstone, the American representative of the League against Imperialism, and Ryan, an Australian, who represented the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. This Congress was addressed not only by Johnstone and Ryan, but also by Jawaharlal Nehru,

1. *Scé, Indian Annual Register, 1927, Vol. II, p. 117.*

Bradley, Spratt etc. Johnstone maintained that the League was an international expression of the struggles of the colonial peoples for independence and hoped that the Congress would affiliate itself to the League. He was arrested on the opening day after he was leaving the Hall. Ryan similarly hoped that the Congress would establish contacts with the P.P.T.U.S.

A significant resolution of this Congress condemned the Trades Disputes Act and decided in favour of a general strike against it, though it was never implemented. The A.I.T.U.C. affiliated itself to the League against Imperialism. But far more important was the Resolution of the Congress on 'Labour and Future Constitution for India' which declared the following to be incorporated in any future constitution :

1. Socialistic Republican Government of the Working Class.
2. Abolition of Indian States and Socialistic Republican Government there.
3. Nationalisation of Industries and Land.
4. Universal adult franchise.
5. Free compulsory education.
6. Freedom of speech and association.
7. Right to work and maintenance and provision for social and unemployment insurance including maternity benefits.
8. Non-enactment of repressive and reactionary labour laws etc.

This Congress registered the victory of the communists and other Left-wing elements on some vital points. At this Congress Nehru was elected President for the coming session. Among the two Vice-Presidents elected were Bhupendra Nath Dutt and Muzaffar Ahmad. Dange was elected one of its Assistant Secretaries. The Jharia session really marked the high tide of communism in the trade union field. It was also indicative of the fact that the Right leadership was gradually losing ground and it was not long before a split occurred at the next session at Nagpur.

But far more important than these struggles over affiliations, principles and resolutions and leadership on

the platform of the A.I.T.U.C. was the effect of the great strike-wave (1928-29) over the industrial organisation in the country. To check the phenomenon and to check the menacingly growing communist activity the Government brought two bills before the Central Legislative Assembly : the Trade Union Bill and the Public Safety Bill. The Trade Union Bill was brought before the Assembly towards the end of 1928 and became law in 1929. It was divided into three parts : the first provided for the establishment of Compulsory Courts of inquiry and conciliation boards; the second made strikes illegal in public utility services such as Railways, Postal Services, Water and Light Supply, unless each individual going on strike gave one month's notice; the third declared illegal strikes which had any other object than or in addition to the furtherance of a trade dispute within the trade or industry in question. It also prohibited sympathetic strikes.¹

But there was a further problem according to the Government : that of European Communists in India whose arrivals and activities synchronised with the rising tide of strike struggles. The problem was how to send them back to Europe, for under the existing law the Government could not force Europeans out of the country. There was, for example, the case of Mr. B. G. Horniman, the Bombay journalist, who was asked to go out of the country but who refused and whom the Government was unable to deport. The failure of the case against Spratt in 1927 also showed inadequacy of ordinary law to deal with the problem. To remedy this was brought before the Assembly the Public Safety Bill on 6th September, 1928. Called Communist Bill in the original draft, it was styled Bolshevik Removal Bill by the Anglo-Indian Press.

The Bill was to be applied to a person who (a) "directly or indirectly advocated the overthrow by force or violence, of the Government established by law in British India

1. *Indian Annual Register, 1928-29—Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, also see, L. Hutchinson : Conspiracy at Meerut,*

or the unlawful interference with the ownership of property" or (b) "sought to foment or utilise industrial or agrarian disputes or other disputes of a like nature with the object of subverting organised Government in British India" or (c) "was a member of or was acting in association with any society or organisation whether in British India or elsewhere."¹

Moving the Bill, Mr. Cerar, the Home Member, Government of India, argued that "Power was necessary for the preservation of all those conditions which were the fundamental basis of all forms of ordinary society".² He maintained that there was a movement which if left unchecked would ultimately prove destructive to the whole heritage of culture, civilisation, religion, organisation of agriculture, industry and commerce and the whole structure of society might be destroyed.³ Mr. Cerar quoted from Roy's Letter to prove what were the actual aims of the Communists.⁴

After having vividly pictured the dangers inherent in the spread of communism, the Government expected the nationalists to support the Bill. The repressive character of the Bill, however, alarmed nationalist India and the Indian National Congress proved to be unwilling to back an Act so wide in its repressive powers, that even the left nationalists of the Congress would be put in a position of

1. See C. I. Patel: *Life of V. Patel*, quoted on p. 50.

2. See, *Annual Register*, 1928, Vol. II, pp. 170-1.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *This letter became controversial and later became famous as Assembly Letter. It was said to have been written by Roy in December, 1927 in which he had given directions to Indian Communists. Its authenticity was denied by Roy in a statement issued from Zurich (see Indian Annual Register, 1928, p. 281). In the Assembly Mr. Iyenger also questioned the genuineness of the letter and asked if it was signed. Mr. Cerar said that though it was not signed, it bore corrections of typed letter in Roy's handwriting in possession of the Government (see, Annual Register, p. 171). Writing much later the Bengal Communist Muzaffar Ahmad vouchsafed about the genuineness of the letter. [M. Ahmad: Opt. Cit. '83].*

jeopardy. The Congress leaders feared that such a power once introduced might be used to stop any movement in the country, agrarian, industrial or even political which aimed at the amelioration of the poor. Moreover, even the communists in India at this stage were regarded more as the champions of the needy and the poor than dangers to 'civilised' society. This was also one reason why Mr. N. M. Joshi, the moderate Trade Union leader, opposed the Bill. Speaking on the Bill he observed that it was designed to penalise the preaching of certain doctrines which were helping the labouring classes. He was of opinion that the strikes were due to bad conditions, retrenchment etc. The Bill failed to pass, the President of the Assembly, Vithal-bhai Patel, casting vote against it. Notwithstanding this failure, the provisions of the Bill were later made law by an ordinance early in 1929.

The Communist Political Line

The Communist activity in the trade union field followed a clear line and corresponded to a well-established pattern, and for that reason it is easy to single out and describe. In the political field, however, the line of action was neither so clear nor so well-demarked, on the contrary it was to a considerable extent ambiguous and confused, particularly in the early years of this period. There were varied reasons for this.

There were, as we noted in chapter two, difficulties connected with the application of the Thesis of the Second Congress of the Communist International to India. In case of India, moreover, the odd part of it was that the task of directing the activity of the Indian Communists fell on to the shoulders of M. N. Roy himself. It would be remembered that at the Second Congress his Thesis, emphasising social antagonism inside the nationalist movement, had been passed along with that of Lenin; though the unanimous opinion at the Congress in the end had been to lend support to revolutionary movements for national libera-

tion but also simultaneously to start building Communist Parties to maintain the independence of the working masses. In his subsequent guidance of Communist activity in India Roy based himself on his own Thesis. Even at the Congresses of the International in 1922 and 1924 he continued to emphasize his Thesis. For the Communist groups in India, small in number, with only a handful of members, this was a programme of stupendous proportions, if it was to be carried to the letter.

The withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation, moreover, posed a number of issues : whether or not to support the national movement; if the national movement was not to be supported how then was the task of obtaining national freedom to be accomplished? If it was to be supported what precisely did this support mean? What about organising Communist Party itself ?

To begin with the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement provided specific direction for criticism and discussion. Like other left wingers in the National Congress the Communists were against its withdrawal and according to them there was no justification for it. Contrary to those who supported the withdrawal on the ground that it was already losing strength, they wanted the Non-Cooperation to be carried to its logical conclusion : to them non-cooperation meant "the suspension of the operation of all productive forces," carrying with it the implication of a mass movement supporting the 'No-tax Campaign' and leading up to a General Strike all over the country. According to them one of the causes of the failure of the movement was that it was not accompanied by such campaign.¹

Material for criticism of a more severe nature and, one which from a Marxist standpoint gave poor results, was provided by the Bardoli resolutions of the Congress in February, 1922. These endorsed the suspension of the

1. M. N. Roy : *Aftermath of Non-Cooperation*, p. 3.

Non-Cooperation and asked the Congress workers to advise the peasants to pay land revenue and other taxes (withheld under the no-tax campaign) to the landlords and to the Government. Clauses 6 and 7 of it read—"The Working Committee advises Congress workers and organisations to inform the ryots (peasants) that the withholding of rent payment to zamindars (landlords) is contrary to the Congress resolutions and injurious to the best interests of the country.

"The Working Committee assures the zamindars that the Congress movement is in no way intended to attack their legal rights and that even where ryots have grievances, the Committee desires that redress be sought by mutual consultation and arbitration."¹

So far as the Congress was concerned it was inevitable that when the Non-Cooperation itself was withdrawn all subsidiary movements connected with it should be withdrawn. But the Communists took the Bardoli resolutions, with over-emphasis on legal rights of landlords, to be a declaration of principles.² Writing later Dutt maintained that behind the suspension and the resolutions in support thereto was hidden the class-interests of the Indian bourgeoisie. M. N. Roy variously termed it as the debacle of Gandhism, decomposition of the national movement, death of the National Congress. Some Kisan leaders also criticised this resolution of the Congress and as we shall show later on from this period started independent class organizations of peasants.

But what did these criticisms of Congress mean? Did they mean that henceforth the National Congress was to be described as reactionary and counter-revolutionary? So far as the local Communists, who had grown out of this national movement, were concerned there was no question of regarding it as reactionary. They were still loyal to the movement and believed that it should be supported. To

1. P. Sitaramayya: *History of the Congress*, p. 392.

2. R. P. Dutt: *India Today*, p. 328.

them criticism of the Congress did not mean antipathy to it. Indeed they believed that national unity was a prerequisite to the securing of national freedom.¹ Indeed their conclusion seems to have been to press forward organising of the masses of workers, to lead them through strike struggles for the enforcement of their immediate economic demands and thus prepare them, organisationally as well as ideologically, for the ultimate task of establishing Socialism. In the beginning there was a tendency to think that workers should concern themselves only with their own economic grievances and not concern themselves with national struggle. However, this tendency was very shortlived.

The Communist International, too, was still in favour of lending support to the nationalist movement. Its Fourth Congress (1922) enjoined two kinds of tasks for Colonial and semi-Colonial countries: (1) 'to establish and consolidate the nuclei of Communist Parties which will stand up for the interests of Communism as a whole', and (2) 'to give utmost support to the national revolutionary movements.'² It even reprimanded those Communists who believed that the Communists should not take part in the nationalist struggles but should only defend the class interests of the workers. The resolution of the C.I. maintained: "The refusal of Communists in the Colonies to participate in action against imperialist oppression on the pretext of alleged 'defence' of independent class interests is opportunism of the worst kind, calculated only to discredit the proletarian revolution in the East."³ It also called attention to a mistake of a quite contrary nature, namely the policy of isolation from the immediate and

1. *We have on this point a highly instructive material in Roy's 'Political Letters'. Indeed the local Communists in the beginning laid so much stress on national unity that they objected to 'abolition of landlordism' and 'agitation against bourgeoisie' embodied in Roy's programme. (see, Ibid, p. 15).*
2. *Resolution and Thesis of the 4th Congress of C.I., p. 30.*
3. *Ibid, p. 58.*

everyday interest of the working class for the sake of national unity and peace.¹

Similarly, the Fifth Congress of the C.I. (1924) postulated three kinds of tasks :

- (a) Formation of Communist Parties with the object of representing the general interests of the proletariat.
- (b) All-round support of the national revolutionary movement.
- (c) Within the framework of national movement, the rousing and promoting of Social movement.²

Roy's Project of a People's Party.

However, as already indicated Communist activity at this stage was under the guidance of M. N. Roy who put emphasis on social movements but did not emphasize the role of a Communist Party, and held that the primary task of Communists in Colonial and Semi-Colonial countries was to successfully solve the problem of national liberation but this did not mean establishing contact with and offering support to the national liberation movements as such, but only to the national revolutionary elements; that is to peasants and workers and other revolutionary elements inside that movement so that the national movement, which had been betrayed at Bardoli might be restored on a new basis.³ He held that it was only under a political party representing the workers and peasants and other revolutionary elements that the national revolutionary struggle could come to final victory. This was his conception of a National People's Party, more or less on the pattern of a united front of the exploited classes against imperialism.⁴ Roy was not the

1. *Ibid.*

2. *International Press Correspondence*, 7th June, 1928.

3. *Fifth Congress of C.I.*, p. 196.

4. *Ibid.*; also see *From Fourth to Fifth Congress of C.I.*, wherein a report on India evidently written by Roy suggested three kinds of tasks: (a) restoration of national liberation movement, (b) formation of National People's Party, and (c) establishment of proletarian class-party.

only advocate of a Party of the People. Speaking at the 4th Congress of the C.I. even Radek advised becoming nuclei, not only of the future workers' party but also of a future people's party.¹

Roy's advocacy of a People's Party proceeded on the assumption that the struggle for national freedom had been deserted by the 'bourgeoisie' and, therefore, it could not succeed as a 'pure bourgeoisie' movement.² He regarded the Indian National Congress as 'objectively' revolutionary but its leadership as 'reactionary' and bourgeois and held that the national movement could not succeed under 'bourgeois parties', because the objective tasks of Colonial revolution far exceeded the limits of bourgeois democracy.³ According to Roy the reasons why the bourgeoisie could no longer play a revolutionary role in colonial countries were mainly two : (a) The native bourgeoisie had entered into a compromise with imperialism, and (b) its relationship with feudal elements was too close.⁴

It was, therefore, necessary to extend the social basis of the nationalist movement by bringing in the interests of workers, peasants and petty bourgeois elements. He maintained : "A democratic movement which goes on in spite of the betrayal of the bourgeoisie represents the classes that are essentially exploited and expropriated."⁵ This third force was to be built around a programme of revolutionary Nationalism embodying the social, economic and political aspirations of these classes.⁶ This was not a Socialist programme but only a programme of revolutionary nationalism and hence it could be carried out by

1. *Report of the IV Congress of the C.I., 1922.*

2. *M. N. Roy : Political letters, p. 16.*

3. *Report of the Fourth Congress of C.I., p. 196.*

4. *M. N. Roy : Future of Indian Politics, p. 9. Part one of this book deals only with Economics of compromise, and Politics of Compromise. For detailed view of Roy on the subject, see, Ibid.*

5. *Opt. Cit., p. 90.*

6. *M. N. Roy : Aftermath of Non-Cooperation, p. 25.*

a revolutionary national party and not by a Communist Party.

Although not quite free from ambiguity and inconsistency, the idea kept Roy preoccupied between 1922-26. In the spring of 1922 Roy, in collaboration with Abani Mukherjee, published a pioneering piece of work, *India in Transition*,¹ in which he tried to interpret the contemporary Indian society from a Marxist, historical materialist standpoint, and also to analyse prospective developments. In reality the book was an attempt to provide a theoretical foundation for the stand—political and economic—that Roy had already taken at the Second World Congress of the C.I. A fairly large number of the book were posted to selected persons in India, almost all of which reached the destination.

He pointed out that the laws of social and historical development formulated by Marx were, despite denials by the orthodox nationalists, applicable to India which had passed through the different stages of social evolution analogous to those in the West, though due to local circumstances, particularly due to physical and climatic conditions, slavery, feudalism and even capitalism took somewhat modified forms.²

The nationalist movement in India, like that in any other country, was bourgeois in its origins and subsequent development. The initial impulse for the formation of the Indian National Congress, was the desire of the nascent Indian bourgeoisie for unfettered capitalist development of the country, but the fact of the presence of imperialism and the fact that the Indian bourgeoisie had grown as an appendage of imperialism, and was closely connected with the landowning class, and the further fact that this bourgeoisie, therefore, was a weak and vacillat-

1. *The book was printed in Berlin, but published in the name of a fictitious publisher from Geneva.*

2. *Opt. Cit., p. 96.*

ing bourgeoisie, made the Indian national movement under its leadership an essay in compromise, negotiations and concessions. This found reflection in the fact that the growth and strength of this national movement proceeded *pari passu* with the growth of the economic power of the bourgeoisie. Indian bourgeoisie, thus, would be satisfied if concession could be obtained through compromise and without any struggle. This germinating idea later developed into the theory of decolonisation with which Roy's name was later associated.

But there was a third factor to the situation, namely the masses of peasants and workers whose basic interests demanded an uncompromising struggle against imperialism, but who were still not in a position to lead the national movement independently. Thus arose the necessity of a united front against imperialism.

There was thus a triangular struggle, a national struggle against imperialism and a social struggle. "The development of the bourgeoisie", Roy maintained, "stiffens the national struggle as well as intensifies the class-cleavage by creating a proletariat class."¹

But, according to Roy, the overthrow of the British rule will be achieved by the joint action of the bourgeoisie and the masses, but Roy was as yet not sure how this consummation would take place.²

A basic drawback of Indian nationalism was its lack of theoretical foundation, and its association with obscurantist, irrational, religious, revivalist notions, and it could not succeed unless it extricated itself from these. It was here that Gandhism came in for sharp criticism at the hands of Roy. Being a culmination of these social tendencies Gandhism could not provide the philosophy of Indian nationalism.³ In subsequent years

1. *Opt. Cit., Chapter VIII.*

2. *Opt. Cit., Chapter I.*

3. *Opt. Cit., Chapter VIII.*

criticism of and attack against Gandhism became a recurrent theme of Roy.

Writing much later Roy had the following claims to make in respect of the impact of the book in India : "The pioneers of the Communist Party of India all had their first lessons in applied Marxism, and indeed in revolutionary politics, from this book. All frankly acknowledged the indebtedness. Subsequently, they denounced me as a renegade. But that is the ethics of communism, which was one of the main reasons for me to part company with the immoral cult."¹

Roy came more definitely for a Party of the People on a programme of revolutionary nationalism in his book 'What Do We Want?', prepared during the middle of 1922 and mailed to India before the Fourth Congress of the C.I. In this work he maintained that mere slogan of Swaraj was not enough. Mere political independence or Swaraj would not only not bring an end to the system of exploitation—capitalism and landlordism—from which the masses of the people suffered, but it might enthrone native capitalists and landlords to power. It was, therefore, always necessary to remember that political independence was first to economic freedom and social emancipation. The masses could not remain satisfied with the vague formula of Swaraj. The revolutionary national movement must give an outline of Swaraj and must demand a programme of national reconstruction which, to Roy, must state the following : "1. That our National State (Swaraj) will be based on the principles of universal suffrage. 2. That the principal means of production, distribution and exchange (land, mines, factories, railways, waterways etc.) will be owned by the Democratic State and operated under the control of workers' committees, elected by and from among the workers employed therein. 3. That landlordism be abolished and the ownership of

1. *M. N. Roy's Memoirs*, p. 555.

land be vested in the State, which will distribute it among those who cultivate it.”¹ Only a revolutionary mass action would ensure such a Swaraj. The Indian National Congress must be persuaded to adopt such a programme, failing which a mass Nationalist People’s Party be formed. Roy thus unfolded his programme of action : ‘The redress of the immediate grievances of the Indian workers and peasants should be our object. In case of conflict between the interests of the native capitalist and the worker, we must boldly take the side of the latter, if we are sincerely fighting for the welfare of the majority of the Indian people. Such demands of the workers as the right of organisation, the right of strike, the recognition of the unions, the eight-hour day, minimum wages, proper housing facilities etc., should be included in the Action Programme of the Indian National Congress or failing this a Party of the Masses should be organised setting forth the demands of the Indian workers and peasants. Every local strike should be developed into a general strike combined with political and economic demands, at every available opportunity. Labour unions should be organised, not to reconcile the interests of the employers and the employees, but to act as militant organs of the working class struggle.’² And further : ‘Our object should be to create discontent everywhere against the present system of exploitation, and to intensify it wherever it exists. Thus will the ideal of Swaraj be brought within the understanding of the workers and peasants of India. Let us lead them forward under the slogan : ‘Down with Foreign Rule’, ‘Down with all Exploitation’, ‘Land to the Peasant and Bread to the worker’.’³

Roy agreed that a long, hard struggle lay ahead but assured that external forces would aid the struggle.

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 15.

2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 35.

3. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 43.

On the eve of the Gaya Congress (December, 1922) Roy published a programme of revolutionary nationalism which set forth three main tasks of the nationalist movement, that is complete independence, a National Assembly elected on universal adult suffrage, and a federal republican form of government.

The detailed programme ran thus :

- (a) Complete National Independence.
- (b) Election of a National Assembly by Universal suffrage.
- (c) Establishment of Federal Republic of India.

In the social and economic field it asked for :

- (I) The abolition of landlordism and the distribution of land among the peasantry.
- (II) Reduction of land rent to a fixed minimum. Establishment of State Agricultural Cooperative Banks to provide cheap credit to the cultivator.
- (III) Modernisation of agriculture and abolition of indirect taxation.
- (IV) Nationalisation of railways, mines, waterways, telegraphs, etc.
- (V) Minimum wage for labour, and eight-hour day.
- (VI) Protective labour legislation with recognition of Unions and the right to strike.
- (VII) Workers' Councils in industries.
- (VIII) Profit-sharing in all industries.
- (IX) Free and compulsory education.
- (X) Separation of state and religion.¹

An Action Programme was also produced which, among other things, included :

- (a) Organization of the poor peasants to demand abolition of feudalism.
- (b) Mass-demonstration with slogans of 'non-payment of rent and taxes'.
- (c) Resistance against high prices, the salt-tax, etc.

1. M. N. Roy: *Aftermath of Non-Cooperation*, p. 83.

- (d) Demand for 8-hour day, a minimum wage, etc.
- (e) Full recognition of labour unions and right to strike.
- (f) Support of all strikes, politically and financially by the Congress.
- (g) Organisation of National volunteers.
- (h) To enter the Councils with the object of wrecking them.
- (i) Country-wide mass Civil Disobedience.¹

These also formed the substance of a Manifesto addressed to the Gaya Congress by the Communist International.

Both these programmes were addressed to the National Congress for discussion and adoption. They were specially meant for C. R. Das who was talking of organising a new party. They were also meant for other radical nationalists. This Congress was attended by communists like Dange, Chettiar, Sharma etc, though they completely failed to influence the Congress. But neither the Congress nor the Swaraj Party of Das which emerged after the Congress even discussed this programme.² The publication of the programme as being from a Bolshevik agent through the agency of Reuter frightened Das and others who might have sympathy with it. Das in fact was a liberal, and his new party stood for liberal values.³ What led Roy to expect much from Das was the latter's advocacy of the need for the establishment of labour and peasant organizations throughout the country to supplement the work of the Congress, his talk of the masses and above all his popular slogan of 'Swaraj for the 98

1. *Ibid*, p. 85.

2. P. Sitaramayya: *History of Congress*, p. 462; *Annual Register*, 1923, Vol. I, p. 834.

3. In May, 1923 the Swarajists called an all-India conference in Allahabad and finalised their programme. The Party formally came into existence in October, 1923. Its object was to 'create an atmosphere of resistance making Government by bureaucracy impossible'. It also spoke of supplementing the work of the Congress by helping the labour and peasants throughout the country. (*Indian Annual Register*, 1923, Vol. II, pp. 143 & 162).

per cent. Das, however, was not in favour of separate organisations of peasants and workers detached from the Congress. Accordingly at the Gaya Session (1922), the Congress appointed a Committee to assist the A.I.T.U.C. in organising labour with a view 'to improve and promote their well-being and secure to them their just rights and also to prevent exploitation of Indian labour and of Indian resources.'¹

In the beginning Roy was even in favour of taking part in Legislative Councils which Das was advocating provided they were combined with extra-parliamentary activity. He wanted to utilise the Councils 'as a useful means of revolutionary mass struggle' on the basis of a number of concretely formulated minimum demands of the oppressed masses.²

But a liberal like Das, evidently, could not satisfy Roy who was thinking in terms of mass-struggle and class-action. At the first opportunity Das asserted emphatically that he had no sympathy with the party of violence gaining ground in the country, and that he stood for private property. He also remarked that he stood for a fair deal to peasants and workers but this was not to be achieved through class-struggle.³

Indeed other shortcomings in the approach of Das and the Swaraj Party were perceived by the communists, then and later. It was felt that the Party turned away still further from any basis in the masses, i.e. the workers and peasants who had no ground for compromise with imperialism. It was also stated to be the party of the progressive upper bourgeoisie.⁴ The economic programme of the Swaraj Party reflected the interests of native capitalism and landlordism.

1. *Annual Register*, 1923, p. 844.

2. *A. K. Hindi: M. N. Roy*, p. 127.

3. *M. N. Roy: Aftermath of Non-Cooperation*, p. 85.

4. *R. P. Dutt: India, today and tomorrow*, p. 151.

Roy put faith in C. R. Das and the Swaraj Party for some time, but their activities and pronouncements disillusioned him. By the middle of 1923 Roy came to the conclusion that the obstructionist tactics of the Swaraj Party within the Councils had failed and the Party instead of wrecking the Council, had wrecked itself. According to him Das was a sentimentalist and not a revolutionary. In an open letter to C. R. Das written in February, 1923 immediately after the formation of the Swaraj Party and angered by his Faridpur speech in which he denounced violence, party of violence and Bolshevism, Roy pointed out that there was no mid-way between revolution and reversion to constitutionalism.¹ He further posed the problem : "The Indian working class can't be led to the anti-imperialist struggle with the programme of bourgeois nationalism, but on the other hand, the anti-Imperialist struggle can't be successful without the active participation of the working class."²

It was in this state of disappointment that Roy wrote his 'Political Letters'. He seemed to be bitter with the Indian National Congress and its leadership, particularly with the leadership of Gandhi. But the showings of his communist disciples, Dange, Chettiar, etc no less disappointed him. He said : "The Left-wing, that is, the objectively revolutionary elements, could not stand out clearly at Gaya."³ He dubbed the consummation at Gaya as being the funeral ceremony of non-cooperation. He now became a more trenchant critic of the Congress, its leadership and their philosophy and maintained that national struggle could not be led by them. He observed : 'It has been proved at Gaya, if proof were still needed, that the national struggle can be led, neither by the reactionary petty-bourgeoisie acting through the orthodox 'no-changers' . . . nor by the radical intellectuals desirous

1. *The Masses of India : Future of Indian Nationalism*, Jan. 1926.

2. *Political Letters*, p. 42.

3. *M. N. Roy : Political Letters*, p. 11.

of harking back to the folds of constitutionism.'¹ He attacked the puerile cult of non-violence, the antiquated belief in 'Charkha and Khaddar', but equally decried the futile terrorist cult of violence and maintained that it is only through a revolutionary mass action based upon violence that imperialism could be overthrown. He urged the adoption of a rationalist, materialist outlook and of the doctrine of class struggle. He criticised those of his followers at home who resisted his opposition to non-violence, landlordism and even his bitter criticism of national leadership.²

He again emphasised the need of a new party which would not be a secret organisation but 'an open mass organisation with a socio-economic programme.'³ As in his 'What Do We Want?' he again emphasized that the movement would grow only through a consistent series of class-struggles and mass action against landlordism and capitalism, and assured that once a mass action was started in India they could count upon the support of the revolutionary world proletariat.⁴ But he took care to point out that their programme was not Bolshevik or communist, but only a modified programme of Social Democracy. India was not yet ripe for Bolshevism and she must evolve through the stage of bourgeois democracy.⁵

Roy's 'Future of Indian Politics' (1926), in which he turned in detail on the question of the historic necessity for a People's Party, was the culmination of Roy's ideas on the subject. Roy agreed that though the 'class struggle in the contemporary Indian society has not arrived at the very last stage, it approximates that stage so much as to have the proletariat at the head.'⁶ But he

1. *Ibid*: pp. 10-11.

2. *Opt. Cit.*, pp. 29-32.

3. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 47.

4. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 13.

5. *Roy: Aftermath of Non-Cooperation*, pp. 36-37.

6. *Future of Indian Politics, in the Masses of India, April, 1926, p. 9.*

also maintained that the objective programme of the proletariat would not be imposed on the movement inasmuch as the allies of the proletariat were not yet fighting for socialism. Roy concluded : 'The future of Indian politics will be an intensified fight for national liberation with revolutionary democratic ideal, under the standard of a people's party. The proletariat, led by its own party—the Communist Party—will exercise hegemony in this revolutionary struggle for democratic national freedom.'¹ To begin with such a Party was to start as an opposition bloc of left-wing revolutionary factions inside the Indian National Congress but which would eventually grow into a revolutionary party of the people.² Roy also held that though this was not to be the party of the 'proletariat', it was to be the beginning of the party of the proletariat.³

Roy's programme was thus for a dual organisation, a legal nationalist party with a radical republican programme (People's Party) and an illegal Communist Party inside it. He explained how Communist Party should be first formed in a conference of 'our own comrades' and then a conference of radical elements inside and outside the existing nationalist parties be convened to discuss the plan and programme of the People's Party; the communists would take initiative in calling such a conference not as communists but as nationalists.

But Roy's project of a People's Party could not be successful although such People's Parties were formed in some provinces.⁴ A number of factors prevented successful carrying out of the project of a People's Party. Firstly, during the first few years of the period under review the activity of the Communist International lost dynamism and singleness of purpose due to the death of Lenin and the struggle for power that took place in Russia. Secondly,

1. *Ibid*, p. 14.

2. M. N. Roy : *Aftermath of Non-Cooperation*, p. 28.

3. M. N. Roy : *Future of Indian Politics*, p. 96.

4. *From the Fourth to Fifth World Congress*, p. 69.

the official line of the Communist International was not quite favourable to this idea of a 'left' Nationalist Party, on the contrary it gave priority to the formation of a strong Communist Party. And finally, most of the Indian Communists were opposed to the tactics of Roy. At this stage they found Lenin's Thesis easier to follow.¹ Moreover, the idea of communists in Europe varied from time to time : (i) Idea of a People's Party with illegal Communist Party in it, (ii) Communist Party should be open and legal, (iii) W. & P. P. as a veiled Communist Party. But communists at home were more fascinated with the ideals of 'Labour Swaraj', 'Labour Swaraj Party', Workers' Party, Socialist Party or Communist Party, and did not appreciate the complex intricacies involved in the vacillating, inconsistent advice.

Attempts at formation of a legal Communist Party.

We have previously seen how five small communist groups in five different centres, constituting the nuclei of the future development of the C.P.I., had been formed; though no central party under a centralised leadership was created. These groups, numerically weak, ideologically immature and financially handicapped, continued to trek their existence with no appreciable increase in their strength or activities. Only Bombay and Calcutta groups had semblance of some activity.

Apart from the formidable difficulties inherent in the situation in India, economic, political, cultural, religious and moral, two factors accounted for the delayed emergence of the C.P.I. even after the establishment earlier, of the ideological centres. The one was the vacillating, confused and sometimes even contradictory nature of the advice tendered to the local communists in this respect by the communists abroad which was but an expression

1. *The Socialist*, 15.7.24.

of the weak and ambivalent nature of relationship between the Indian communists and the communists abroad. The other was the ideological confusion among the indigenous communists themselves.

The decision of the Second Congress of the C.I., repeated at other Congresses thereafter, was to the effect that while pursuing the policy of support to the national revolutionary movements in the colonies, strong nuclei of communist activity should be formed, culminating in the constitution of a Communist Party so as to protect and safeguard the independence of the communist movement as a whole. The Fourth Congress of the C.I. emphasized the necessity of establishing and consolidating nuclei of Communist Parties which would stand up for the interests of communism as a whole.¹

At this Congress even Roy maintained that national liberation could not be successful under the leadership of the bourgeoisie and, therefore, there was the necessity of Communist Parties. But in relation to India men like M. N. Roy who actually inspired, guided and controlled Indian communism at the time were not so sanguine about the formation of a Communist Party but instead, laid stress upon the 'primary task' and the 'primary goal' of the communists in the colonies, that is winning national independence and to that end, as we have already seen, Roy variously veered round the idea of a People's Party, a Party of the Masses, a Republican Party, a National Revolutionary Party, a Party of Workers and Peasants, etc, and naturally the question of the formation of a Communist Party was side-tracked, as it was bound to be. Even when Roy spoke at a Communist Party, its immediate purpose, according to him, was to revolutionise the social character of the national movement. Thus sneaking later about his controversy with Lenin at the Second Congress and their ultimate resolution, Roy

1. *Resolutions and thesis of Fourth Congress of C.I.*, p. 30.

maintained : "I concretised his general idea of supporting the colonial national liberation movement with the proposal that Communist Parties should be organised with the purpose of revolutionising the social character of the movement under the pressure of organised workers and peasants. That, in my opinion, was the only method of concretely helping the colonial peoples in their struggle for national liberation. I maintained that, afraid of revolution, the nationalist bourgeoisie would compromise with Imperialism in return for some economic and political concession to their class. The working class should be prepared to take over at that crisis the leadership of the struggle for national liberation and transform it into a revolutionary mass movement."¹

Moreover, consistent with the decision of the Second Congress, Roy advocated the formation of an illegal apparatus of the C.P.I. because he felt that in the conditions obtaining in India an open, legal Communist Party could not exist, much less function as a Communist Party should. And further, it appears that with a remarkable degree of egoism and arrogance that characterised Roy all through his life, Roy wanted to be the father of the revolution in India, and, naturally, could not countenance any Communist Party formed without his actual guidance and control, and by elements who were not his loyal supporters.

As late as his *Future of Indian Politics* (1926), Roy considered the proletariat as a component part of the nationalist forces, and though he did not minimise the importance of the Party of the proletariat but its organisation was 'purposely left out.'²

In a letter to Bagerhatta (22-10-1924) Roy maintained : "The immediate task of the communists in India is not to preach communism but to organise the national

1. *Roy Memoirs*, p. 382.

2. *M. N. Roy : Future of Indian Politics, Preface.*

revolution. The role is to be the heart and sole of the revolutionary National Party.¹

Left to themselves even the local communists were in no less state of confusion as to their objectives. As already indicated, they had variously interpreted Marxism and the Russian Revolution in terms of 'Labour Swaraj', 'Workers' Republic', 'Swaraj for the Masses', 'Socialist State' etc., and naturally there was a considerable amount of controversy and the resultant confusion as to the nature of the Party to be formed.

At this period a controversy went on among the Indian communists regarding the constitution and programme of an all-India working class Party or a Communist Party or a Socialist Party by organising the socialist opinion in the country. The issues of the Bombay weekly paper *Socialist* throughout the year 1924 were full of essays and letters over the question from communists and others in different parts of the country, and probably some concrete steps might have been taken in the direction of the formation of a Communist Party of India. But the Cawnpur Conspiracy Case prevented its realization.

Immediately after the Cawnpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case, the U.P. groups of communists led by Satya Bhakta formed a legal Indian Communist Party at Cawnpur itself which came into open existence on 1st September, 1924 with Satya Bhakta as Secretary. Among others associated with it were Maulana Hasrat Mohani, V. H. Joshi, Rama Shanker Avasthi and Pandit Ram Gopal.²

From September to December, 1924 the Party could claim a membership of 78 including three ladies, of whom 34 belonged to Cawnpur and 16 from other districts of U.P., 11 from Rajputana, 7 from C.P., 5 from Bengal and 2 from Bihar. Professionally 16 of the members were

1. *Meerut Conspiracy Case*, p. 67.

2. *The Socialist*, 17th December, 1924, *Indian Communist Party*, p. 7.

journalists, 11 national workers and quite a few merchants, but the working class elements in what was a Communist Party were negligible.¹

A provisional constitution of the Party was circulated. It proposed the name of the Party to be Indian Communist Party and its object the 'establishment of complete Swarajya and the system of society based upon the common ownership and communal control of the means and instruments of production and distribution of wealth in the interests of the whole community of India.'² The organisation of workers, peasants and middle class intellectuals was to be the immediate object of the Party. Any person who agreed with the objects and programme of the Party could be its member. The Declaration of Principles of the Party maintained that there was a cleavage of Indian society between those who owned means of living, that is, land, factories etc. and those excluded from such ownership; and there was the resultant antagonism of interests manifesting itself into class-struggle. It spoke of the need for abolition of this antagonism by emancipating the working masses. This emancipation, it maintained, would be the work of working class itself. But Satya Bhakta, the Secretary of the Party, assured the Government that his Party would not have any truck with Bolshevik agents.

Though the Government was suspicious of the Party and raided its office at Cawnpur once in December, 1924 and again in February, 1925 and in July, 1925, but both the Bombay communists and the communists abroad looked askance at the Party and dubbed it as having being consisted of 'doubtful elements'. A hand bill prepared by the C.P.I. in 1941 maintained that it consisted

1. *Ibid.*

2. *The Socialist (19.11-1924), The constitution and programme of Indian Communist Party by V. H. Joshi.*

of fools and spies.¹ The communists generally have looked down upon this Communist Party.

At the same time as the annual conference of the Indian National Congress then being held at Cawnpur, the Indian Communist Party of Cawnpur convened an open all-India conference of the Party towards the end of December, 1925 which was attended by communists and other radical nationalists from different parts of the country. British Communist M.P. Saklatvala had been requested to preside over the conference but he could not attend. Singaravelu Chettiar of Madras presided over the conference; and Maulana Hasrat Mohani was the Chairman of Reception Committee. It was the first legal communist conference in India. Apart from Satya Bhakta and his associates, communists like Muzaffar Ahmad, S. V. Ghate, K. N. Joglekar, R. S. Nimbkar, Abdul Mazid, Ayodhya Prasad, Janki Prasad Bagerhatta etc. attended this conference.

By the time of this conference the membership of the Party, according to Satya Bhakta, had swelled to 300, though he did not give any analysis of the membership.

The nature and character of Satya Bhakta's Indian Communist Party were elaborated both by Chettiar in his Presidential address and by Maulana Mohani in his address as Chairman of the Reception Committee. He maintained that the Party was a purely Indian one and its aim was to establish Swarajya or complete independence by all fair means.² After the attainment of Swaraj the Party aimed at the Soviet form of Government, or a workers' state, and, therefore, it also aimed at the emancipation of workers from their economic bondage.³ He maintained that the existing parties could not realize these goals because they had no support from the masses

1. *Courtesy late Ajoy Ghosh.*

2. *Indian Annual Register, 1925, Vol. II, p. 367.*

3. *Ibid.*

of workers. The debacle of Swaraj Party was well-known. The National Congress, though a national organisation, burdened itself with redress of all sorts of grievances, political, social, economic and religious and, therefore, it got itself hopelessly entangled in mutually contradictory ideas and actions.¹ Naturally the communists, according to him, had to make the greatest contribution to national struggle.

With Government persecutions in the form of Peshawar and Cawnpur Conspiracy cases with their outlawry of communism in so far as it functioned as an agent of the C.I. still fresh in their mind, both Chettiar and the Maulana took care to point out that they were not Bolsheviks nor was Indian communism a form of Bolshevism. At least for the time being the Party was to be restricted to India and its relation with similar parties of other countries in general and with the Communist International in particular was one of sympathy and mental affinity. They were fellow-travellers but not subordinate to any one, nor did they receive any practical help or financial aid from any outside agency.²

The formulations of Satya Bhakta, particularly in regard to the name of the Party and its relationship of detachment with International Communism differed with those of others like Muzaffar Ahmad, Ghate and Joglekar. They challenged Satya Bhakta's pretensions of national communism with their own conception of internationalism and maintained that in line with the practice of the Communist International, the name of the Party should be Communist Party of India.³ Finding himself in minority Satya Bhakta left the place with his papers and files. He later resigned from the Party and still later retired from politics.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *M. Ahmad : Opt. Cit., p. 21.*

The victorious elements at the Cawnpur conference brought together the communists of different places and constituted a central committee of the Communist Party of India at Cawnpur itself.¹ The headquarters of the Party shifted to Bombay. This open constitution of the Party and its committees exposed it for Government persecution and for this reason, among others, it drew sharp criticism from communists in India and abroad.

S. V. Ghate and Janaki Prasad Bagerhatta became the joint secretaries of the Party at Cawnpur. Subsequently the communists became suspicious of Bagerhatta as an informer and sensing this he himself left the Party in 1927.² After this Ghate became the General Secretary of the Party and remained so till March, 1929 when he was arrested in connection with the Meerut Conspiracy case.

Satya Bhakta's Indian Communist Party also drew trenchant criticism from M. N. Roy who became suspicious of it and its sponsors because it was formed openly in the same city of Cawnpur soon after the Cawnpur Bolshevik Conspiracy case wherein four communists were convicted of conspiring to deprive the King Emperor of his sovereignty of British India. The early pronouncements of Satya Bhakta that they had nothing to do with Bolshevism, that M. N. Roy was a 'Bolshevik agent', and that the workers of Cawnpur would not give countenance to any Bolshevik agent, and further his repudiation of the programme of revolutionary nationalism as contained in the leaflet 'Revolutionary'³ and his assurance to the Government that his office would not entertain any literature containing anything against the Government or the Emperor of India made the suspicion of Roy all the

1. M. Ahmad: *Ibid*, p. 21.

2. *Ibid*.

3. It was a leaflet found by the police after its search of the office of the Communist Party of Cawnpur in December, 1924.

more deeprooted.¹ But Roy did not enter into polemics till the first open conference of the Party in December, 1925, although Iyengar of Madras had informed him that Satya Bhakta's Party was not a real Communist Party. The deliberations of this conference prompted Roy to open a broadside against it.

According to Roy the Communist Party of Satya Bhakta suffered from the following limitations. It posited the twin goals of a Soviet form of government for India and complete independence to be attained by all fair means, but Roy held that neither could be realized through 'fair means'. Moreover, the goal of the Soviet form of government for India was a remote one and a true Communist Party must decide the role the proletariat would play in the historic struggle for national liberation and must, accordingly, decide how it was going to educate, organise and equip the proletariat to play this role.² According to Roy, under the leadership of the C.P.I. the proletariat must rally around themselves all available forces of national liberation.

The national communism of the Party was another eye-sore to Roy according to whom there could be no such thing as national communism. He maintained : 'Communists betray their historic role, if they fail to recognise the international character of the class struggle. A national communist is an enemy of the proletariat.'³

On the question of international affiliation Roy held that they never maintained that it was obligatory for the Indian proletariat to be affiliated to the Communist International but what they did maintain was that the struggle of the Indian working class for national and social freedom must be closely linked up with the international proletarian movement.

1. *The Masses of India* (January, 1926): *What is a Communist Party?*

2. *The Masses*, *Ibid.*

3. *M. N. Roy: National Communism (Beware of friends). The Masses of India* (September, 1926).

Roy further pointed out that the Party was not a Communist Party at all as it did not subscribe to the conditions laid down by the famous 21 points of the Second World Congress of the Communist International.

Roy concluded : "A 'Communist Party' that does not fight for national independence of a subject people, does not lead an agrarian revolution against feudal landlordism, is opposed to international affiliation, preaches that the proletariat should not act till they are hundred percent organised, does not have any idea about militant labour organisation, does not believe in revolution, is hostile to armed insurrection and eager to do justice to the possessing classes, such a 'Communist Party' can receive justice from the British, but will never be the party of the Indian working classes—the vanguard in the struggle for freedom."¹

Though Satya Bhakta had by that time resigned from the Party, yet in May, 1926 he refuted the charges made by Roy, and quoted approvingly from an article by Acharya² in a German paper to the effect that far from being a communist Roy was a British spy, though this insinuation was denied by Roy.³

Many sessions of the newly formed central committee of the Party were held between 1926 and March, 1929. Sometimes it met four times a year. The committee itself was reorganised in 1927, 1928 and again in 1929. This undoubtedly provided the much-needed centralised, coordinated leadership, but lack of complete unanimity on questions, ideological and organisational, tactical and strategical, besides paucity of funds and deficiency of membership continued to be a handicap to the proper functioning of the Party. To add were the multiplicity of advices received

1. *The Masses of India (January, 1926): What is a Communist Party?* p. 14.
2. We have already referred to him as being a rival of Roy at Tashkent. By this time Acharya had severed connection with Communism.
3. M. N. Roy: *National Communism (Beware of false friends) in September, 1926 in the Masses of India.*

from abroad in form of the C.I. and its Eastern Section (Colonial Bureau), Roy and his Foreign Bureau, and the C.P.G.B. While the ultimate authority of the C.I. remained unimpaired, Roy and the C.P.G.B. clamoured for the privileged position of being the sole guide of Indian communism. This plagued the organisation of the C.P.I. during this period.

The Colonial Bureau arranged a discussion on the situation at Amsterdam on July 11-12, 1925. It was attended by Roy, C. P. Dutt, R. W. Robson etc. There was a heated discussion over the respective role of Roy and the C.P.G.B. The drifting policy of Roy was criticised and it was decided to send British Communists to India to help the movement there. As already mentioned, so far as the C.I. was concerned, this did not mean dispensing with the services of Roy who continued to be acknowledged as before, but gradually Roy's influence declined and that of the C.P.G.B. ascended, though Roy made intermittent efforts to assert his authority. The publication of his book *Future of Indian Politics* (1926) was an effort in this direction. But in the meanwhile he was sent to China early in 1927 and remained away from the scene for almost the whole of 1927, though, indefatigable Roy was not silent even in China and spread disaffection among the Indian troops and sent messages through the North East. Though Roy again tried to assert his authority after his return from China, but Roy's stars were on descent, and he steadily lost his domineering position. The misfortune of Roy was that the communists in India also did not appreciate the stand of Roy and were often critical of him.

Though this provided a handicap so far as the local communists were concerned but this did not preclude them from their own plan of action which they carried on on the basis of their own interpretations.

In July, 1925 an appeal to the workers of Great Britain was issued by the Communist Party of India, Bombay, but printed in London. Entitled *Imperialism and Labour*, it

discussed the meaning of British policy in India and maintained that the real interests of the workers of the two countries being the same, imperialism was harmful to both. Imperialist policy could not benefit British workers. It castigated the British Labour leaders and urged that the struggle against Imperialism and its allies inside the Labour movement should be inspired not by liberal sentiments but by the consciousness of class interests. The disruption of the Empire was the *sine qua non* for the introduction of a new social system in Britain. It appealed to the British working class to dissociate itself from the imperialist politics of the bourgeoisie and supported India's struggle for freedom. The imperialist reconciliation with the Indian bourgeoisie would open up a new era of imperialist exploitation and, therefore, it was necessary to organise a united front against Imperialism. The Commonwealth of Nations was a lie.¹

The peculiar communal problem in the country has always baffled the Leftists. In their scheme of things there was little scope for communal considerations. But things did not move according to their horoscope. While the communists talked of the masses, their common economic demands, end of exploitation etc., the unity between the Hindus and the Muslims, forged during the Khilafat and the non-cooperation days, showed increasing signs of cracks after the withdrawal of the movement and the squabbles that followed. During 1925-26 communal riots took place in a number of places, the one in Calcutta in 1926 being most ghastly. These outbursts of communal frenzy, in their very nature being antithetical to the communist scheme of things, invited the communists to address themselves for the first time to the problem.

In July, 1926 a Manifesto on Hindu-Muslim problem was issued by J. P. Bagerhotta and Muzaffar Ahmad from the office of the Bengal Peasants' and Workers' Party for and on behalf of the Communist Party of India.

1. *Ibid.*

It maintained that the basic economic demands of both the Hindu and the Muslim masses were identical, and it was only the fanatics who gave a religious colour to Swaraj. The unity of the Hindu-Muslim masses was essential in the struggle for national emancipation. Moreover, the freedom movement could succeed only if it were based upon an economic programme and imbued with the idea of social equality. The ideal of social-economic emancipation must, therefore, be kept in the forefront of the struggle.¹

The Indian National movement suffered because it was based upon shaky foundations. The unity achieved in the wake of non-cooperation and Khilafat was an artificial one, being built on the unreliable foundation of religious sentimentalism. But a political movement, involving unity of the Hindu-Muslim masses, must be based only upon their basic, common economic demands which alone could bring about a solid and durable national unity.²

It ended with an appeal to the workers, the peasantry and the lower middle class elements to free themselves from religious and communal bias and work for economic emancipation. The battle for national freedom was to be fought by the masses and it must be to their interests.

In December, 1926 a Manifesto by the C.P.I. addressed to the Indian National Congress on the occasion of its annual session at Gauhati, was published from London. The Manifesto took a disconcerting note of the national movement and the nationalist parties which were divorced from the masses. Both the National Congress and the Swaraj Party were deficient in this respect. The Manifesto found the national movement in a state of decomposition. The leadership of the Swaraj Party was predominantly

1. *The Manifesto of the Communist Party of India: Hindu-Muslim problem, July, 1926, Calcutta.*
2. *Ibid.*

bourgeois, and there was a contradiction between the leadership and its rank and file. Its programme and policy were always dictated by the capitalist and landowning classes. It maintained : "The Swaraj Party will not be able to become a Party of the People unless it breaks away completely from the bourgeoisie seeking compromise with imperialism."¹ Obviously, still thinking in terms of building up a party on the programme of revolutionary nationalism, it urged the Swaraj Party to adopt a new programme reflecting the interests of the people.

The National Congress fared no better. Though no fundamental differences divided them, yet, it was split up in warring factions. Like the Swaraj Party it was under the domination of the bourgeoisie. It thus addressed the Congress : "The National Congress at Gauhati must adopt a programme of democratic national freedom. Pseudo-parliamentarism should be replaced by militant mass action. The policy of surrender and compromise should be discarded. The National Congress should be liberated from the treacherous bourgeois leadership and brought under the inspiring influence of Republican People's Party."²

Like the Manifesto of July, 1926, this Manifesto also addressed itself to the communal problem. It reiterated the earlier stand that the non-cooperation and Khilafat agitations quickened religious fanaticism at the expense of political consciousness. The decomposition of the national movement gave impetus to communal conflict.

While the upper classes of both fought for rights and privileges, the masses of both the communities had their economic exploitation. Thus there was no need to be discouraged by communal conflicts. It maintained that a party of the people would find solution to this problem by helping them to be conscious of their economic interests,

1. *A Manifesto to the All-India National Congress, Gauhati, 1926 by the C.P.I.*
2. *Ibid.*

and by giving them a courageous lead against their common enemy. It admitted that this could not be done overnight but there was no other remedy of communalism.¹

It also held that the communal question should be approached as a question of a national minority and one of the main planks in the nationalist platform must be protection of national and communal minorities. If the nationalist movement failed to give such guarantee, then imperialism would get a chance of offering it and thus drive a wedge through the nation. It noted that the behaviour and pronouncements of more than one prominent Hindu nationalist leaders gave the Muslims sufficient reason for suspicion.²

The communist from all over India met at a conference in Bombay on May 31, 1927. At this meeting important decisions on organisational and ideological problems relating to the C.P.I. and the W. & P. P. were taken, the tendency now being towards a more and more centralisation of leadership. Ghate was again elected General Secretary of the Party. Dange, who had been released on 24th May, 1927 did not attend the meeting, but he was elected to the Presidium if he was willing to sign the creeds. Muzaffar Ahmad and K. S. Iyengar were also elected to the Presidium.³

Dange's utterances after his release aroused some misgivings among the communists in India and abroad. So far as the technique of revolution was concerned Dange still held fast to the basic ideas posited in his book *Gandhi vs. Lenin* (1921). Thus at a reception meeting after his release on 24th May, 1927 Dange said: "I am neither a Bolshevik nor an opponent of British Government. The Russian communists are called Bolsheviks; I am Indian communist."⁴ Later he maintained that he was against

1. *Op. Cit.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Meerut Conspiracy Case documents: Judgement of Yorke.*

4. *Ibid.*

British capital and not against the British people. This speech of Dange drew sharp comments from the 'Masses' (July, 1927).

Dange began to be active from 4th June onwards. He thought that the Communist Conference at Cawnpore did a damage to the communist cause. Addressing the Sacco-Vanzetti meeting he differed from President Jhabwalla advocating beforehand the fixed policy of violence or non-violence. His whole idea was to organise the masses on the basis of class struggle. Much later, elucidating his ideas at a workers' meeting (7-6-1928) in Bombay, he held that Indians could fight the Government in two ways—constitutionally and by revolution. He, however, held that as Indians had no arms and ammunition, revolution could not be successful: "until you get and win over the Indian army on your side, you must go on constitutionally In the police and in the army our Indian people abound. We must try to win our people on our side and throw away the Government We will purge the evil out from the police and the government and hand over administration to your hands."¹

Naturally some disagreement developed between Dange and rest of the Party. At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 2nd August, 1927 it was reported by Nimbkar and Mirajkar that Dange's statements were contrary to Party's policy. At a meeting of the Executive on 26th August, Dange was accused of having failed to adhere to the Party's line, but a vote of censor by Joglekar was lost. Dange contended that the Party was not functioning on proper Marxian line. He continued to work in the Party.

The reorganised and regrouped Party adopted a constitution in May, 1927. Though this had been one of the points of contention between the orthodox communists and Satya Bhakta at Cawnpore in 1925, but the Party did not

1. *Government Report on communist activity in India, 1928.*

affiliate itself to the C.I., though it continued to have close relations with the C.I. and was recognised as such by it.

Partly due to the risk of Government repressions, and partly due to differences among the communists on the issue, they were deterred from seeking international affiliation, though Muzaffar Ahmad maintains that paucity of members of the Party precluded them from doing so.¹

Still the constitution declared that the Party looked to the Communist Parties of the world and to the C.I. for lead and guidance in the work undertaken by the Party in the country. It provided for a Foreign Bureau which was to act as the organ through which the international relations of the Party could be maintained; and to keep constant touch with other Communist Parties and the C.I.

It further affirmed that only those subscribing to the programme laid down by the C.I. would be eligible for its membership. It provided for a Central Committee, for a Presidium, and for factions. The comrades' factions were to function inside the National Congress, and the Trade Unions on behalf of the Party.

Among the tasks of the C.P.I. were: (a) complete independence of India by the violent overthrow of the British rule, and (b) establishment of a Soviet Government.

The Foreign Bureau which was the Bureau of Indian communists abroad, (in Holland) consisted of Roy, Md. Ali Sipassi and C. P. Dutt. Its functions were advice and instructions, and financial aid for newspapers; the tasks that were performed also by the C.P.G.B.

At this time there sprang up a new communist inspired international organisation in Europe known as the "League against Imperialism and for National Independence." It was born out of a conference of oppressed peoples held in Brussels in the first half of February, 1927. German youth leader, Willi Munchenburg, and Virendranath Chattopadhyaya were elected joint secretaries of the organisation.

1. *M. Ahmad, Ibid, p. 26.*

Jawaharlal Nehru attended this conference as a representative of the Indian National Congress and was elected to its Executive Committee. For a couple of years a main item on communist agenda was the question of affiliation of the W. & P. P., and the National Congress to the League, and fraternal alliance between the League and the C.P.I.

In alliance with the new emerging left-wing inside the National Congress under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, Srinivasa Iyengar, Satya Murti and Subhash Chandra Bose, the communists made the first organised attempt at the Madras session of the Congress in December, 1927 to influence the decisions of the Congress. Indeed it was from this Congress that the all-India leadership of communists, and workers' and peasants' parties made themselves felt on an all-India plane. Communists like Dange, Muzaffar Ahmad, Ghate, K. N. Joglekar, R. S. Nimbkar, Philip Spratt etc. attended the Congress and worked in a concerted manner. The Workers' and Peasants' Party, Bengal, addressed a Manifesto to this Congress, signed by the Bengal Communist Muzaffar Ahmad. The widely circulated Manifesto demanded boycott of Simon Commission on principle, a National Constituent Assembly, universal adult suffrage, complete independence, mass action in the form of general strikes and non-payment of taxes, land to the peasant, bread for toiler, and education for all.¹

The Manifesto was critical of the Congress which, according to the Manifesto, was under the influence of the bourgeoisie. It maintained: "The programme of bourgeois nationalism (defence of the interests of the landowning and capitalist classes) has failed to stir the enthusiasm of the Nation The National Congress must be liberated from the influence of their spokesman. The National Congress, if it wishes to conduct the struggle

1. *The Manifesto of the W. & P. P. to the Indian National Congress, Madras, December, 1927.*

for national freedom, must become the party of the people.”¹

In the absence of Mahatma Gandhi at the Congress and in absence of opposition from the Right due to indifference, they succeeded in getting adopted a unanimous resolution on complete independence (Poorna Swaraj) as the aim of the national movement. Other resolutions of this Congress that bore the impact of leftist influence were, the boycott of the Simon Commission, the affiliation of the National Congress to the League Against Imperialism, expression of solidarity with the Chinese people in their fight for freedom. But the passage of these resolutions was in reality more a measure of the influence of the fast growing left-wing inside the National Congress and particularly of its leader Jawaharlal Nehru than of the communists. In fact the Congress did not accept the communist demand for mass action in the form of general and local strikes and demonstrations against the Simon Commission. Nor did it accept the proposal for the formulation of a minimum demand.

But despite these fanfare of manifestos, appeals, propaganda and agitations, communism in India was not developing on lines satisfactory to international communism.

An international review of the work of the Party between 1924-28 maintained that the Party had not been able to develop into a genuine Communist Party, and that the problem of the organisation of a Communist Party as the vanguard of the proletariat, which must lead the national revolution, was still to be solved.²

This slow advance of the Party is also corroborated by Philip Spratt who maintains that when he arrived in India there were fifteen or twenty nominal members, most of

1. *Ibid.*

2. *The C.I. (Between Fifth and Sixth Congress, 1924-28). Report on India, p. 473.*

whom did not know what a Communist party was and did not try to organise it or carry on its work.¹

Saumyendranath Tagore left for Europe in April, 1927, as a representative of the Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party. Although he had not been associated with communist activity while at home and had, therefore, no intimate knowledge of its working, yet he made a disparaging report to Moscow about communism in India and about the role of Roy.² About the latter he maintained that he had made exaggerated reports about the situation in India. He maintained that in 1927 there was no Communist Party of India.³ While this was later challenged to be a false statement by Indian communists,⁴ the reports, undoubtedly, paved way for the fall of Roy.

After his return from China, Roy tried to resume his leadership of Indian communism by addressing a letter dated 30th December, 1927 to the C.C. of the C.P.I.⁵ In this letter he raised and discussed the following : (a) The organisation of the C.P.I. and Workers' and Peasants' Party, their relationship etc., (b) International affiliation, and (c) The coordination of the activities of the Party in the country and its emigrant section. Besides, the letter threw a flood of lights on other aspects of the situation.

As in the past Roy admitted the historical necessity of a C. P. and maintained that since 1920 they had been working for the organisation of a C. P. in India. He went on : " We are of the opinion and this opinion is supported by the International that in the period of history the working class can fight for freedom only under the leadership

1. P. Spratt : *Blowing up India*, p. 35.
2. He later wrote a book entitled "*Historical Development of the Communist Party of India*".
3. M. Ahmad : *Opt. Cit.*, p. 166.
4. *Ibid.*
5. The letter was intercepted and read in the Central Legislative Assembly. Thereafter it became famous as the Assembly Letter. In a statement from Europe dated the 28th August, 1928, Roy challenged the authenticity of the letter, but Muzaffar Ahmad regards it to be genuine.

of C. P. Even the national revolution in its last stages will not have any other loyal and resolute leader than the C. P. This has been proved by the experiences in China. A real struggle against capitalism can be conducted to the final victory only by a party which is guided by the revolutionary principles of Marxism and Leninism, and such a party is the C.P.”¹

But although there was general agreement on the question of necessity of forming a C.P., there were differences on the method of forming it. Roy averred that though some comrades at home seemed to believe in the possibility of organising the C.P. legally but, on the experiences of the last seven years, he did not share their belief. He opposed this legalist deviation which would render the C.P. a harmless nominal entity.²

A C.P., according to Roy, was not formed by a number of individuals declaring themselves communists. It was done in action first for the propagation of communist principles and programmes among the masses, then organising those subscribing to these and then fighting for the realisation of these ideals. He continued : “Fight for legal existence but build the party illegally. Remain a legal party as long as possible but build up a powerful underground organisation. Preserve your legality as long as you can but don’t have it at the expense of activities essential for the growth of the Party.”³

If the C.P. was illegal, it did not mean that it would not be known. It would be known through journals, manifestos etc. The programme of the Party would be published; members would be recruited; central and local organisations would exist and function; conferences would be held where necessary; every member would actively and openly participate in labour and peasant movements and also in revolutionary nationalist struggle, as a communist

1. *Meerut Documents*, p. 29.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

under the guidance of the Party; only it would not be known that he was a communist.

Roy admitted that a party developed more quickly if it functioned legally. Illegality had also a special disadvantage in India where workers were illiterate and propaganda had to be oral. Besides, in India the task was to organise and lead a mass movement which was impossible without legal possibilities. Thus the necessity of an open, legal Workers' and Peasants' Party.¹ Roy observed: "Therefore, we proposed the formation of the W. & P. P., through which the communists could function legally, through which agitation and propaganda could be carried on legally, and the workers and peasants could be organised to defend the interests of their class."² But Roy also pointed out that the W. & P. P. was not and should not be only a legal cover for the C.P., for in that case it would be a change of name to deceive the police and it would not be necessary to have two parties.

On the question of international affiliation Roy urged that the W. & P. P. should affiliate itself with the League against Imperialism, and the C.P. with the C.I. He regretted that the 'Comrades in India' did not fully appreciate the implications of international affiliation and interpreted it only as the means of getting material aid for the movement in India. He emphatically maintained: "The C.P. must unquestionably be a section of the C.I. It is practically treated as such, but no formal request to this effect has yet come from our Party in India. A C. P. must be an organic part of the world communist organisation. It can't be otherwise and call itself communist."³

Roy equally regretted the fact that the Indian communists in immigration were not fully trusted and were mostly looked upon as outsiders who could serve only as financial agents. He maintained that by virtue of being

1. *We shall refer to it in detail later.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Opt. Cit.*

communists, the Indian communists in immigration were automatically members of the C.P.I. Roy went on: "The centres in Berlin and Paris are agencies of the C.I. to look after Indian affairs. The C.P. of India will have its relation with the C.I. through these centres and not through London. Any British comrade that may come to India comes to work there under the supervision and in accordance with the C.C. of C.P.I. He has no superior right unless he comes with a mandate from the C.I. as its representative. No such representative has yet been sent to India."¹ Here Roy was making the obvious reference to the fact of his disapproval of the independent work of the C.P.G.B. in relation to the Indian affairs.

Roy urged for the recruitment of increasingly large number of new members to both the C.P.I. and the W. & P. P., and assured that the necessary financial assistance would be made available.

An important meeting of the Central Committee of the Party was held in September-October, 1928 at Bombay at which important decisions for revolutionary mass action were taken. The meeting was attended by the leading members of Bombay and Bengal parties. A Call to Action was issued at this meeting. Later in the Meerut Conspiracy Case this meeting was dubbed as 'War Council' by the Sessions Judge at Meerut for its espousal of revolutionary action.

It was in 1928 that B. T. Ranadive, the fiery, diehard, left communist, and S. V. Deshpande entered the Party. Deshpande had left his college during the Non-cooperation and gradually veered round the Party.

Ranadive had been a brilliant student of the Bombay University, having secured a first class first in Economics at the M.A. examination. He had been inspired towards the Party by Dr. Adhikari, his elder maternal cousin.

Although the Sixth World Congress of the C.I. meeting during the summer of 1928 had adopted a new colonial

1. *Ibid.*

thesis, but the Indian communists were not immediately informed of it.¹ The Party had the first inkling of the new change when Dr. Gangadhar Adhikari returned in December, 1928 from Germany after six years' stay, having secured the Doctorate degree in chemistry from the University of Berlin. While in Germany he had become a member of the Communist Party of Germany. When he landed in Bombay on 10th December, 1928, his luggage was searched by the police wherein were found a number of letters (including the thesis Revolutionary Movement in the colonies).

At the time of the first all-India conference of the W. & P. P. at Calcutta in December, 1928, two meetings of the C.C. of C.P.I. took place; the one during the conference and the other at the end of the conference in January, 1929. At this time P. C. Joshi was admitted to the Party. We shall refer to the decisions of these meetings when we consider the W. & P. P. meet at Calcutta.

Workers' and Peasants' Parties

While the main activity of the communists was directed towards working within the trade unions and while in the political field, not very successful attempts were being made to establish a People's Party and a legal Communist Party with a centralised leadership, there started coming into being certain other political organisations for mass action in the form of Workers' and Peasants' Parties. Though not expressly desired by International Communism, yet they were clear expressions of certain tendencies then operating inside international Communism and inside the local Communist groups as well as among other Left-oriented individuals in Bengal, Bombay, and the Punjab. The conception of a People's Party, while it did not advance appreciably beyond the blue-print stages, helped to provide for the transition towards the formation of Workers' and Peasants' Parties. M. N. Roy and his

1. *Spratt: Opt. Cit., 42, 1*

fellow advocates of a People's Party, though they conceived such a party to be a national party of revolutionary elements, often talked as if it were a party of peasants and workers only, and from them the idea of a Workers' and Peasants' Party caught the imagination not only of the local communists but also of other left elements and seemed to be gaining strength.¹ A new fillip in support of these developments came by the formation of the Peasants' International. We have indicated earlier how the local communists, initially, had interpreted the Russian Revolution and Marxism as making for a workers' raj and consequently, had started work only among the workers, while work amongst the peasants, in what was predominantly an agricultural country, was neglected, and this happened despite the fact that the Communist International had, from the very beginning of its existence, so far as Colonial and semi-Colonial countries were concerned, insisted upon work among the peasants. As already mentioned the Second Congress had adopted an Agrarian Programme which maintained that agrarian revolution was the crux of the democratic revolution in the colonies.

The Third Congress of the C.I. (1921), with its slogan of the United Front, confirmed this alliance.

The Fourth Congress (1922) similarly opined as regards the conditions of struggle that "the agrarian question is of first class importance in majority of the countries of the East."² It further held that "only agrarian revolution aiming at the expropriation of the large land owners can rouse the vast peasant masses destined to have a decisive influence in the struggle against imperialism. The revolutionary movement in the backward countries of the East

1. As early as July, 1923 Roy gave the idea of the 'speedy organisation of the Workers' and Peasants' Party of India'. Roy: *Political Letters*, p. 44. Similarly C. P. Dutt writing on *Indian Politics in the Labour Monthly of July, 1925* desired a Workers' and Peasants' Party for remedying the disabilities of Indian labour.

2. *Resolutions and Thesis of the 4th Congress*, p. 55.

cannot be successful unless it is based on the action of the masses of peasants,"¹ and for that reason revolutionary parties in these countries were asked to define their agrarian programme. Speaking at the Fifth Congress Zinoviev emphatically asserted : "He who can't work among the peasants is not a Leninist."²

In Soviet Russia itself under the New Economic Policy a greater cooperation of workers and peasants was being advocated. The new emphasis in this direction went as far as the formation of the Peasants' International with the purpose of rallying the exploited peasants in all countries and to lead them together with industrial workers against Capitalism and Imperialism. The International issued the slogan : "Peasants and Workers of all countries unite."³

No wonder Peasants' & Workers' Parties surreptitiously started coming into being in various countries of the East. Originally the International itself *did* not desire them, and in fact it was well aware of the dangers inherent in them from a pure proletarian class point of view but it not only did not oppose their spontaneous formation but also encouraged them when they started taking concrete shape. Thus speaking at the Fifth Congress (1924) Manuilsky pointed to the emerging phenomenon of Workers' and Peasants' Parties and spoke of the two-fold danger regarding the attitude of communists to such parties, that is (1) "of ignoring phenomena which are revolutionising the East," and (2) "of losing proletarian character by collaboration with petty bourgeois parties."⁴ He, therefore, spoke of the advisability of communists taking initiative in joining such parties.⁵

1. *Ibid*, p. 56.

2. *Fifth Congress of C.I.*, p. 25.

3. *From Fourth to Fifth World Congress*, p. 102.

4. *Fifth Congress*, p. 187.

5. *Ibid*, p. 188.

In case of India, according to Roy and others who supported the Organisation of Peasants' and Workers' Parties, these were the media through which the communists could find their way to the masses. Moreover, Roy was still thinking of W.P.P. as a substitute for his People's Party. He thought that the object of the W.P.P. was to make the new Party "the rallying ground for all the nationalist revolutionary elements into a revolutionary nationalist mass party."¹

Though by no means a purely communist organisation, communists were the main driving force of the W.P.P. as they emerged but their establishment was assisted and made possible also through the existence of an alliance of the Left groups inside the Congress with the communists and proletarian elements. Philip Spratt, who came to India in December, 1926 on behalf of the C.P.G.B., states that his 'principal messages were that the Communist Party of India should launch a Workers' and Peasants' Party as a legal cover, and that the members should get into the trade unions and obtain the leadership of them.'² This is also corroborated by Roy's Assembly Letter.

But a contrary view, based primarily on the first origins of the Party as Labour Swaraj Groups within the National Congress but ignoring the subsequent developments, is maintained by Muzaffar Ahmad. According to him 'those who had come forward to establish the Labour Swaraj Party were not inspired to do so either by the Communist International or by M. N. Roy. They had no contact, however, with the Communist International, though, of course, they had felt the influence of the October Revolution and also of the Communist International.'³

The Workers' and Peasants' Parties passed through two phases : (I) they existed as labour groups within the

1. *International Press Correspondence*, 18th February, 1929, Articles by Roy on W. & P. P.
2. Philip Spratt: *Blowing up India*, p. 29.
3. Muzaffar Ahmad: *Opt. Cit.* p. 165.

Indian National Congress with no connection with the mass of workers. The Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party, for example, first originated as a Labour Swaraj Party inside the National Congress in 1925. So also did the Madras and Bombay Parties. (II) From the beginning of 1928 they turned more directly towards the masses, adopting a more independent stand-point. The formation of the Girni Kamgar Union was accomplished during this phase.¹

Originally called the Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress, the first Workers' and Peasants' Party was formed in Bengal on 1st November, 1925. Others followed in Bombay, Madras, the United Provinces and the Punjab. These were united in 1928 in the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party which held its first Congress in December, 1928 in Calcutta under the presidency of Sohan Singh Josh. Till this date, but for occasional contacts and consultations, the Workers' and Peasants' Parties functioned in a loose, decentralised manner as practically independent provincial organisations. Of the four such parties in existence only the Workers' and Peasants' Parties of Bombay and Bengal were politically most active. The Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party was based upon individual as well as collective membership, but the Bombay one had only individual membership.² The original motive for the formation of the Labour Swaraj Party in Bengal as a group within the National Congress was dissatisfaction at the stagnation of the Congress and the apparent inability of its leaders to originate any fruitful policy, and at the same time indignation at the way in which the Congress and the Swaraj Party were dominated and used for their own ends entirely by the landlord and capitalist classes.³ While non-coope-

1. *C.I. between Fifth and Sixth Congress*, p. 474.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 476.

3. *The Peasants' and Workers' Party of Bengal: Report of the Executive Committee, 1927-28.*

ration had failed, terrorism also had not succeeded in bringing out the desired result.

The foundation conference of the Party in November, 1925 adopted a provisional Constitution and issued a statement of policy under the signature of Quazi Nazrul Islam which maintained that all other attempts for attaining independence having failed, the Party would seek the organisation of peasants and workers for the purpose. The object of the Party was attainment of Swaraj in form of complete independence of India based on economic and social emancipation and political freedom for all. It sanctioned non-violent mass action for the attainment of its goal. As an ultimate aim the Party demanded nationalisation of 'modern industries and public utilities', such as Mines, Railways, Telegraphs etc. and held that the ownership of land be vested in autonomous and self-contained village communities. Its immediate demands for labour were: minimum wage, a decent living, 8-hour day for five days and a half, housing facilities, protective legislation for old age, sickness and disease, free and compulsory education. For peasants it demanded reduction of land tax, fixity of tenure, non-ejectment etc. As regards membership any member of the National Congress who subscribed to the programme of the Party could be its member.¹

Chief among those identified with foundation and early work were Shamsuddin Husain, Hemant Kumar Sarkar, Qutbuddin Ahmad and Quazi Nazrul Islam.

An all-Bengal Tenants' Conference was held on 6th February, 1926, at Krishnanagar (Nadia) under the presidency of Dr. Naresh Chandra Sen Gupta, and participated by several members of the Labour Swaraj Party. At this conference it was decided to form Peasants' and Workers' Party of Bengal in which the Labour Swaraj

1. *Constitution of the Labour-Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress, 1925.*

Party was merged, and a committee was elected with Dr. Sen Gupta as Chairman and H. K. Sarkar and Qutbuddin Ahmad as Secretaries. The change in nomenclature meant that it was no longer under the Indian National Congress. The Constitution of the Party embodied most of the points of the Labour Swaraj Party.¹ Though some persons wanted to christen it as Workers' and Peasants' Party but the presence, in overwhelming number, of the peasant representatives, prevented it.

The second conference of the Party was held in February, 1927 under the presidentship of Atul Chandra Gupta. There was an address of welcome to the Saklatvala, the communist M.P. The meagre membership of the Party is evidenced by the fact that at this conference the Party had only 40 members, mostly confined to Calcutta, except for a branch at Mymensingh. The Mymensingh Peasants' and Workers' Party known as 'Bangiya Krishak-o-Shramik Dal' had been in existence since 1924, that is, from even before the formation of the Labour Swaraj Party, and it entered the P. & W. Party, Bengal, as a branch. At this conference the name was changed to the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal.

The third annual conference of the Bengal Party was held at Bhatpara in March-April, 1928 under the presidentship of Atul Chandra Gupta. Though the Party had by then about 125 individual members and about 10,000 affiliated members, but only 80 individual members attended the conference which reiterated the demand for a Constituent Assembly, complete independence, social and economic demands of the masses, and asked the workers and peasants to participate in the national struggle.

The activities of the Party were propagandist and agitational in nature and during 1925-28 it started several shortlived papers, the limitation of finance being the

1. *Ibid.*

principal reason for their closure. On 16th December, 1925 it started a Bengali weekly *Lungal* (Plough), edited by Quazi Nazrul Islam and mainly financed by Qutubuddin Ahmad, but only fifteen issues could be published, the last being on 15th April, 1926. In the first issue the famous poem 'Samyavadi' of Nazrul Islam was printed. It reappeared under the name of 'Ganavani' (Voice of the people) on 12th August, 1926 under the editorship of Muzaffar Ahmad, but this paper also fared no better and ceased publication after nine issues. It was revived again on the 14th April, 1927 but could not survive beyond 23 issues. In addition, for sometime, a Bengali weekly 'Jagaran' (Awakening) was published from Kushi in Nadia district which supported the Party but was not a Party organ.

As in Bengal, the W. & P. P. in Bombay also started as a 'Congress Labour Group' in 1925, then became Congress Labour Party, but changed to W. & P. P. in the beginning of February, 1927, with S. S. Mirajkar as its Secretary. Mirajkar had also been the Secretary of the small Labour Group that existed inside the Congress since 1926.

The Party started its organ 'Kranti' (Revolution), a Marathi weekly in April, 1927 under an editorial board consisting of Parwati, Joglekar, Mirajkar, Nimbkar and Ghate.

The Bombay W. & P. P. held that the National Congress and its leaders represented the interests of the properties classes. In the interests of the masses and their party it was necessary to liberate the Congress from the stranglehold of the class interests of its leadership. The National Congress must be persuaded to declare complete independence as its goal. The Congress must reiterate its faith in mass civil disobedience and direct action. But this could only be done if the masses were awakened on the basis of their own demands. The Party formulated such a programme and used to place it before the A.I.C.C. for adoption. Although, in the beginning, they were laughed at but gradually they won recognition as a definite Left-

wing inside the Congress, particularly due to their opposition to Dominion Status and their slogans against the Simon Commission as well as by their work among the workers.

Its main work was confined to industrial workers, and work among peasants was practically neglected. They were successful in organising the municipal workers, dock workers and textile workers.

To simplify work its members were organised into Congress Group, Trade Unions Group, Propaganda Group, Peasants and Youth Groups. Besides there were other members of the Executive Committee which looked after the general interests of the Party.¹

The Punjab group was also gravitating towards a Workers' and Peasants' Party. Abdul Mazed had started work at Lahore after his release in 1924. He and his associates of Lahore worked among the youth, railwaymen and textile workers. They published a Urdu weekly, the 'Mihnatkash' (Worker) but it lasted for barely six months.

Santokh Singh, the Ghadarite, returned in 1926 after receiving training in the University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow. In the meanwhile, other Ghadarites also became active.

He started a Punjabi monthly paper called 'Kirti' (Worker) with emblem of sickle and hammer and later entrusted Sohan Singh Josh with the task of editing it. Firoz Mansoor was the editor of its Urdu edition. The paper received considerable contribution from abroad, particularly from the Ghadarite Sikhs in America, whose contribution was more due to its revolutionary nature than communism.

The Punjab Communists like Sohan Singh Josh and Bhag Singh Canadian met communists from other parts of the country at the A.I.T.U.C. session in 1927, and result

1. *Report of the W. & P. P., Bombay.*

was the fructification of the idea of a W. & P. P. in the Punjab which was formed at a conference at Amritsar in 1927 under the name of the Kirti-Kisan Party. This was as a result of the unification of the Amritsar and Lahore groups. The 'Kirti' became the Party organ. Its head-quarter was at Amritsar. In the beginning Hansraj became President but left in a few months. The Party started under the secretaryship of Sohan Singh Josh. Abdul Mazed was its Joint Secretary.

The Party, under the name of W. & P. P., held its first all-Punjab conference in April, 1928. Though the Party followed the footsteps of the Bengal and Bombay parties, yet it was dominated by peasant elements which found expression in the formulation of immediate and pressing demands of the peasantry like abolition of intermediaries, reduction of rent, abolition of nazranas, fixed rate of interest etc., but it did not extend to rural areas.

The object of the Party was to win freedom from British Imperialism by every possible means, and to liberate workers and peasants from every sort of political, economic and social slavery and to establish their united Socialist Republic.¹

Though the Lahore Group worked among the workers yet, by and large, the activities of the Party were restricted to kisans (peasants). In it there were also some terrorist elements of the Hindusthan Socialist Republican Army and the Nawjawan Bharat Sabha.

The Party paper 'Kirti' appeared regularly but its agitations were not always Marxist but at times they were mixed up with terrorist appeal.

A conference of the Mazdoor and Kisan Sangh of Meerut was held at Meerut in October, 1928 under the presidentship of K. N. Sehgal of Lahore. The Sangh, which so far followed Congress principles, had been in

1. *Cross Examination of Sohan Singh Josh at Meerut.*

existence since 1925. Gauri Shankar, later convict in Meerut case, was its Secretary. A Kisan and Mazdoor Sabha had also been founded by B. Mukherjee at Gorakhpore in June, 1925. It was as a result of this conference that the Workers' and Peasants' Party was formed in U.P. with P. C. Joshi as its Secretary.

The Party demanded complete independence, abolition of Native States, free trade unions, abolition of Zamindari and Taluqdari, land to the peasants, village banks for loan to peasants, 8 hours' day, minimum wage, etc.

'Krantikari', its organ, made its first appearance on November 17, 1928 with the headline : 'We are revolutionaries. The banner of revolt is in our hands.'¹

The Workers' and Peasants' Parties produced a comprehensive plan of national revolution which, they claimed, had not been done by any of the existing parties, and they even justified their existence on these grounds. A resolution of the conference of the Bombay organisation (February, 1927), speaking on the necessity of forming such an organisation expressed itself in the following terms : "Therefore the time is ripe for the creation of a political Workers' and Peasants' Party capable of guaranteeing the social, economic and political progress of these classes, of standing up for their demands in the National Congress, helping with the organization of trade unions and emancipating them from alien influence helping with the organization of peasants on the basis of their economic and social requirements."²

In the beginning the Workers' and Peasants' Parties limited their political work within the National Congress and offered such collaboration to other organizations fighting for independence. There was even an idea to convert the Congress itself into a party of the people.³

1. *Kranti Kari*, No. 1, November 17, 1928.

2. *C.I. between Fifth and Sixth Congress*, p. 475.

3. *Ibid.*

Thus, in practice they functioned as Left Wing of the Congress and their sponsors regarded them as a bloc comprising working class and all exploited masses.¹ The above mentioned resolution of the Bombay organization maintained that for the achievement of the goal of national independence, the Party would collaborate with other organizations.

The Manifesto of Workers' and Peasants' Parties demanded a Constituent Assembly elected by universal adult suffrage to determine the political future of the Indian people and opposed the Royal Commission on Constitutional Reform. Furthermore, it asked the workers and peasants to express their protestations against the Commission through strikes and demonstrations. It was critical of the politics of the Indian National Congress considering that it failed to champion the demands of the masses.

The W. & P. P. as it thus developed was in reality a practical projection of the C.P.I. Though the latter was not illegal, yet the various conspiracy cases had shown that it was difficult to function openly in the name of the Party, and the communists projected themselves through the W. & P. P. All literature, appeals, manifestos, and programmes of the Party were prepared by them. Muzaffar Ahmad, himself a participant in the drama, maintains: 'What we used to decide in the Communist Party was actually put into practice from the platform of the Workers' and Peasants' Party. The leaflets of this party were all drafted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party.'² The communists worked as a caucus within the W. & P. P.

The W. & P. P. did not cooperate with the C.P.I. on the platform of social revolution. The communists worked

1. *Ibid.*

2. *M. Ahmad: Our First Days, in New Age, April, 1958.*

in the W. & P. P. on the platform of national revolution. Still the relation between the two was delicate.

In the letter written in December, 1927 which later became famous as Assembly Letter, Roy took pains to point out the delicate nature of relationship between the C.P.I. and W. & P. P. According to him W. & P. P. was not and should not be only a legal cover for the C.P., for in that case it would be a change of name to deceive the police and it would not be necessary to have two parties. As far as C.P. was concerned he favoured only one party with a legal and an underground organization. He maintained: "We proposed the formation of W. & P. P. as a much broader organization. It should be rallying ground of all exploited social elements (proletariat, peasantry and petty bourgeoisie) which must unite themselves in a revolutionary struggle against foreign imperialism and native reaction, the elements that must participate in the struggle for the creation of such political and economic conditions as will help the proletariat in its further struggle against Capitalism. The communists should be in W. & P. P. and by virtue of their being the conscious vanguard of the working class, will be the driving force of the Party. But the W. & P. P. is distinct from C.P. in that its programme is not a communist programme. Its programme is the programme of the democratic revolution which includes the realisation of the minimum political and economic demands of the workers and peasants. The C.P. supports this programme as its minimum programme."¹

Roy felt that there was no need for confusion about existence of two parties. The formation of W. & P. P. did not mean liquidation of C. P.

Roy felt that the nature of its organization obstructed the full growth of the W. & P. P. It was too openly identified with the C.P. and this kept away many revolutionary elements who could join it on a programme of revolutionary nationalism.

1. *Ibid.*

Till the first all-India Conference of the Party in December, 1928, the W. & P. P. had no functioning, co-ordinated, centralised leadership. The W. & P. P. of Bengal had contacts with that of Bombay, as also with the Punjab Party in that they corresponded with one another for the purpose of common action and for formulation of common policies. As already maintained, the Madras session of the National Congress had also provided a common meeting ground for communists from different parts of the country. Drafted by a joint committee they also issued A Call to Action in October, 1928 which outlined the plan of revolutionary nationalism.

It was planned to hold the first all-India Conference of the Party in February-March, 1928 but it did not materialise, and could be held only towards the end of December, 1928 at the time of the annual session of the National Congress. Sohan Singh Josh, the Punjab communist, presided over the conference which was attended by about 300 persons from Bombay, Punjab, U.P., Bengal etc. The conference was attended by J. F. Ryan, Spratt and Bradley. All important communists and left-wing trade unionists attended it, but Dange was a notable absentee.

Banners and slogans at the conference carried the following : 'We want nothing but complete independence', 'Let land be divided among the cultivators', 'Let Simon Commission go to hell', 'Down with Nehru Report,' 'Down with imperialism', 'Down with bourgeois nationalist hypocrisy', 'Down with capitalism and landlordism', etc. The proceedings of the Conference began with the singing of the 'International'.

The Conference decided to constitute a National Executive Committee for the whole of India and the following were elected as members of the National Executive Committee :

**Bombay — K. N. Joglekar, R. S. Nimbkar, S. A. Dange,
S. V. Ghate.**

Punjab — Sohan Singh Josh, Bhag Singh, F. D. Mansur, M. A. Mazid;

U. P. — P. C. Joshi, L. N. Kadam, Gauri Shanker, B. N. Mukherjee;

Bengal — Muzaffar Ahmad, D. Goswami, Sarkar.

There was some friction over the election of the Executive between the Bombay group and a section of the Bengal group led by Dharam Goswami and Gopen Chakravarti, but a reconciliation was arrived at.

The Conference recognised three main organizational tasks of the W. & P. P.: (i) to assist growth of movement to the utmost, (ii) to clarify its very confused ideas, (iii) to improve its organisation. For the achievement of the first task it favoured alliance with other parties and groups in a mass action, but otherwise it emphasized independence of the W. & P. P.¹

For the first time in its history, as in the history of the C.P.I., it emphatically declared that the basis of the Party was materialistic analysis of society and the fact of class struggle. So far the communists had also been reticent about caste, religion etc, but the thesis also took a critical note in this respect. With obvious reference to Gandhism, the Party declared its complete faith in industrialism.²

The struggle for the achievement of complete independence, which was the first task of the Party, must be a revolutionary one. The Party did not deny the general utility in Indian conditions of non-violence as a tactic but maintained that it would not be necessary for the Indian movement to use this tactic at all times and in all conditions. It was opposed to raising non-violence to the level of a principle.³

The Nehru report, accepting Dominion Status instead of independence also came in for sharp criticism. Its other

1. *Thesis of the First A.I. W. & P. P., Calcutta, 1928.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

flaws were : indifference to the demands of workers and peasants, retention of the native princes and their privileges, support for private property rights, defence of the interests of the big bourgeoisie and the landlords.

A resolution at the Conference emphasized the international nature of revolutionary nationalist and working class movements and spoke of the need for international contact and affiliation with bodies like League Against Imperialism, Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat and the R.I.L.U. Another resolution referred to war-danger against the U.S.S.R.¹

Another resolution favoured abolition of landlordism and, as usual, gave a list of mass demands. There were also resolutions for direct action, a general strike, a mass-campaign for non-payment of rents and taxes etc. It felt that with the experiences in Russia and China as the guide, it was not correct to hold that illiteracy and general backwardness of the masses constituted obstacle to revolutionary action.

An important point the W. & P. P. had to face was the question of relationship with the National Congress. Though these parties originated as Left Labour Swaraj Groups within the Congress, yet as these groups were transformed into W. & P.P. and their independent programmes unfolded themselves, the question increasingly demanded clarification. The Bombay Party had from the very beginning confined itself to work within the Congress, but there was a growing tendency on the part of the Bengal Party to assert its independence. The problem was first discussed when the communists from all over India met together at the time of the Madras session of the National Congress in December, 1927. As already referred, the Manifesto to the Congress had spoken of the timidity of the bourgeoisie and of the liberation of the Congress from its influence, and of the need to transform

1. *Ibid.*

it into the party of the people. But the policy of the Congress was one of general support and the members were asked to continue their work within it.¹

The annual conference of the Bengal W. & P. P. held at Bhatpara (1928) urged its members to endeavour to make the Congress adopt a programme of mass demands and to support them in their current propaganda. It asked the members and other sympathisers to become members of the various Congress bodies and the A.I.C.C. Congress must be supported when it fought against imperialism. At the same time there should be no hesitation to criticise the Congress, but care should be taken in such criticism. It remarked : "We must be careful not to oppose the National Congress without sufficient definition of our opinions or we shall enable our opponents to claim that we are anti-Congress, or even anti-national, and that we stand merely for sectional claims of labour."²

The Conference also decided upon a policy of consolidation of alliance with the petty bourgeois Left of the Congress on the basis of direct action for complete independence against the compromising policy of bourgeois leadership.³ This had an obvious reference to the new emerging Left-wing inside the National Congress.

But at this first all-India meet the Party decided upon a 'definitely independent' role for itself. It argued that it was no longer possible to carry on the old relation. The W. & P. P. was a representative of the advancing mass movement and was based upon the doctrine of class struggle. The dominant leadership of the Congress, on the other hand, associated itself with the 'counter-revolutionary' bourgeois bloc. The two movements, therefore, must separate.⁴

1. *The W. & P. P. of Bengal, Annual Report, 1927-28.*

2. *The W. & P. P. of Bengal, Annual Conference, held at Bhatpara.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

But probably the Party was not yet sure of its strength and its independent role and, therefore, its resolution on the subject went on : " While the W. & P. P. remains relatively weak and unorganised in the country, it will be necessary to follow the traditional policy of forming factions within the Congress organisations for the purpose of agitation, of exposing the reactionary leadership and of drawing revolutionary sections towards the W. & P. P. This policy, however, is only temporary. The W. & P. P. can have no intention of dominating or capturing the Congress. The function of its members within the Congress is purely critical. Our party members, therefore, can't be allowed to take office in the Congress organisations. The object of the W. & P. P. can only be to build up its own independent organisation, so that it can, as soon as possible, dispense with the necessity of agitation within the Congress."¹

Another important matter to be decided was the relation with the Left-wing inside the National Congress whose the left-wing leaders of the complete independence school like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Srinivasa Iyengar, Satyamurti etc. had organised the Independence of India League in November, 1928, though Independence Leagues had earlier sprang up at many places after the publication of the Nehru Report, making the demand for complete independence as the goal of the national movement. The draft programme of the League announced in the November foundational meeting set forth the goal of the League as the achievement of complete independence and reconstruction of Indian society on a basis of social and economic equality.

At the Conference there was a motion that the members of the Party should join the League to capture it but it was rejected. The League was looked upon as the resultant of three different tendencies : (I) a hesitating and ~~an~~ yet a confused move on the part of a section of the

1. *Ibid.*

petty-bourgeoisie towards a revolutionary policy, (II) an attempt by a section of the bourgeoisie to extort concessions from imperialism by threatening it with a movement, (III) an attempt by a section of the bourgeoisie to regain control over the mass movement.¹

Although not homogeneous in membership, the League had a definite policy and programme, but the communists held that nothing was mentioned of the means by which the programme was to be realized. They regarded the League as in essence a bourgeois organisation and its policy an insincere travesty of W. & P. P.² It was regarded as a complete sham.³

The resolution advised W. & P. P. members not to enter the League as its members but favoured work with the League in a united front. It said : "W. & P. P. members can't enter Independence League as members, as to do so would be to attribute to it before the masses a seriousness and importance which it does not possess. The W. & P. P. can only work with the Independence League in a United Front, on the basis of its propaganda for independence, which, in spite of its frivolous character, has some value. But it is necessary to expose the League's faults of programme and policy, and its fundamentally bourgeois, even fascist character, and ultimately counter-revolutionary role."⁴

Roy criticised the W. & P. P. Conference decisions in as much as it took an attitude of hostile criticism of the Independence League, representing opposition to the bourgeois Right-wing of the Congress.⁵ He agreed that the criticism of the programme of the League was essentially correct, but it ought to have been accompanied by a positive attitude in the form of an offer of united front

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. R. Page Arnot : *How Britain rules India*, p. 29.

4. *Thesis, Ibid.*

5. *I.P.C. 1st February, 1929. M. N. Roy : The ways of Indian Revolution.*

on the common platform of anti-imperialist struggle in that the League was constituted of radical anti-imperialist elements. Roy went on : "Indeed no distinction is made between the two factions inside the Congress. When the petty-bourgeois left radicals are trying to oust the bourgeois leaders from the leadership of the nationalist movement, they are not supported. On the contrary, they also were condemned as the enemies of workers and peasants in the same breadth with the representatives of big capitalism and landlordism."¹

Indeed Roy had greeted the formation of the Independence League. He was still thinking in terms of a National Revolutionary Party into which, he hoped, the League would develop.²

International Communism tolerated and even encouraged W. & P. P. but at the same time it made clear that it had never considered them to be a substitute for the separate existence of the Communist Party or that the latter should in any way be neglected. Indeed, this was one of the charges that was later brought against Roy that while he busied himself with the People's Party and the W. & P. P., the actual task of organising a Communist Party was not attempted. What in actual practice happened, was as the C.I. feared; while Communism functioned through W. & P.P. and communists continued to grow in strength, the work of the Communist Party itself was nowhere in sight, though such a Central Party had already been formed in 1925. Active communists devoted all their time in organising and building W. & P. P. to the same degree as the Communist Party itself was neglected. This tendency was pushed to such a point that in 1928 some communists even advocated that the W. & P. P. was a substitute for the C.P.I. This indeed was a complete reversal of what C.I. would have wanted.³

1. *Ibid.*

2. *I.P.C.*, 28th March, 1929.

3. *International Press Correspondence*, 19th March, 1928.

An international report on India, reviewing the developments between 1924-28, discerned the following weaknesses of the W. & P. P. It limited its political activity to work within the Congress and attached more importance to collaboration with it than to its independent role as a party. The address of the W. & P. P. to the session of the Congress in Madras (1927) maintained that if the Congress wanted to carry on the struggle for national liberation it must become a party of the people.

Thus, in making the report at Sixth Congress Kuusinen said categorically that Peasants' and Workers' Party could not constitute a basis for the Communist Party.¹

The Colonial Thesis of the Sixth Congress said, "Special Workers' and Peasants' Parties, no matter how revolutionary they may be, can all too easily be transferred into ordinary petty-bourgeois parties. Therefore, organization of such parties is inadvisable.² But while rejecting the W. & P. P., the communists were asked to utilise existing connections to strengthen the Communist Party, for it was acknowledged that the W. & P. P. gave an unmistakable feeling of a real mass movement for the first time in India; though it was still numerically weak. Writing sometime later Page Arnot regarded the emergence of the Workers' and Peasants' Party as a very important stage in the growth of the leadership of the proletariat because it showed that the working class in India was capable of setting up independent mass organizations and carrying on revolutionary struggle.^{2a} It emphasized the organization of the peasantry but said that "the fighting bloc of workers and peasants can find expression in carefully prepared and periodically convened joint conferences and congresses of the representatives of the revolutionary peasant unions and trade unions."³

1. See, *Report of Sixth Congress of C.I.*

2. See, *Industrial Press Correspondence, 17th October, 1928.*

2a. Arnot: *How Britain rules India, p. 31.*

3. See, *Revolutionary Movement in Colonies, p. 45.*

Workers' and Peasants' Party was also characterised as a 'two class' party and it was argued that a party could represent only one and not two classes. It was also criticized for (a) being a theoretically wrong form of organization, (b) because communists formed only minorities in these organizations, (c) it advocated a wrong attitude towards the peasant question, for it advocated peasant proprietorship, (d) for its treatment of the peasantry, regarding them as indifferentiated mass.¹ Its further weakness, according to Arnot, was that 'our communist friends, who are in this organization, are in this movement as a faction, leading it, regard it as the Communist Party in an Indian shape, and do not see the need for the creation of a separate Communist Party.'²

It was further maintained that the W. & P. P. functioned as a party of legal bourgeois type. No attempt was made to win cadres for which even Roy had criticized them in his Assembly Letter. There was mass agitation but no mass organization, political slogan but no real political organization.

A self-critical note prepared by the Party in 1941 admitted that the Marxist-Leninist equipment of the leading group was weak and no attempt was made to improve it.³

Other criticisms later brought against these parties was that they were 'top organizations', and were in reality nothing but a club of leaders of the revolutionary labour movement. It was alleged that despite their 'subjective devotion to the interests of the proletariat', the leaders proved to be unable to see 'the growth of the class-consciousness of the proletariat and its ability to become the leader of the people's movement.' It was further maintained that the work of the C.P.I. itself was neglected and W. & P. P. appeared before the masses as individuals or small group of leaders and not as representatives of the

1. *Ibid*, p. 31.

2. *Ibid*, p. 31.

3. *Courtesy Mohit Sen.*

C. P. with a clear cut programme. This neglect of the C.P. left the movement without a backbone.¹

At the time of the first all-India Conference of the Party at Calcutta in December, 1928 the Executive Committee of the Communist International sent a message in the form of a Manifesto to the W. & P. P., and to all Colonial people, which was received at the end of the Conference, saying that W. & P. P. was not a section of the C.I. and that as a two-class party it did not deserve the attention of the communists. But as the Central Committee of the C.P.I. had concluded its session by the time the message was received, no decision in respect of the future of the W. & P. P. could be taken.²

Thus, despite these criticisms, the W. & P. P. continued their existence till March, 1929 after which they gradually passed into oblivion, though, as we shall later see, Workers' and Peasants' Parties were revived by some non-communists in the late thirties, and some continued till early fifties.

The Projected Labour Party

While the political activity of the communists was developing along the lines just indicated, another stream of Labour Movement which stemmed from the experiences of the British Trade Unionism and the British Labour Party, was also undergoing development, though its existence was somewhat precarious.

Having given original guidance and inspiration in the formative period of the Indian Trade Unionism, many of the labour leaders in Great Britain encouraged its subsequent development and would have further liked to have seen the establishment of an Indian Labour Party simultaneously with the formation of the A.I.T.U.C. The post-war period was one of great revolutionary enthusiasm which affected the British Labour Party itself and found

1. I.P.C., 19th March, 1933: *Indian Labour Movement*.
2. M. Ahmad, *Ibid*, p. 26.

reflection in its new programme. The 'Labour and the New Social Order' (1918) spoke of the desirability of contact with Labour Parties in other parts of the Empire.¹ We have already seen how Ben Spoor of the Labour Party attended the first All-India Trade Union Congress and mooted the idea of forming an Indian Labour Party. Further, we saw how this idea could not materialise.²

After the failure of the first attempt nothing more was heard of the Indian Labour Party until February, 1923 when the Third Annual Session of the A.I.T.U.C. was being held and on whose agenda there was a resolution recommending the formation of a Labour Party,³ but even here the project could not materialise due to the unsympathetic attitude of the nationalist leaders who dominated this conference.

With the visit of Oswald Mosley of the Independent Labour Party to India, the project was again revived in the beginning of 1925.⁴ He discussed the matter with several nationalist leaders whose attitude was favourable to such a step. But nothing tangible came out of these confabulations, and at a conference of the Members of the Legislative Assembly convened for the purpose Lala Lajpat Rai, who was himself favourable to the project, expressed the idea that the promoters of the scheme should not be impatient. On the contrary, he urged that they should devote themselves to the necessary spade work, study facts and figures and economic life of India and should not indulge in loose talk about communism and internationalism.⁵

Towards the end of the year 1925, the idea gained fresh momentum with the arrival in India of Major Graham Pole who outlined the details of an Indian Labour

1. *Labour and the New Social Order*, 1918.

2. *Chapter II*.

3. *M. N. Roy: Future of Indian Politics*, p. 104.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

5. *Ibid.*

Party in his Presidential address to the Tanjor Railway Employees' Conference.¹ His advice to Labour was :

- (a) To support the Commonwealth of India Bill,
- (b) To demand the right to send workers' representatives to the various legislatures to promote the working class interest,
- (c) Not to ally themselves with Communism, and
- (d) To form an Indian branch of Fabian Society.²

In fact towards the end of 1925 an Indian Labour Party was formed and Lala Lajpat Rai was elected its President but nothing more was heard of it and it soon died out.³

The Madras session of the A.I.T.U.C. resolved that the General Secretary should invite opinion of the affiliated unions on the question of the formation of a Labour Party, but very few unions sent replies. Later, the Executive Committee of the Congress also appointed a committee under the chairmanship of D. R. Thengdi to consider the question. The consensus was against the formation of such a party which found reflection in the presidential address of Rai Sahib Chandrika Prasad at the seventh session of the Congress held at Delhi in March, 1927.

Underlying the failure of these repeated efforts for the formation of an Indian Labour Party was 'the opposition, concealed as well as open, of both the nationalist leaders as well as the communists. The communists, as we have indicated earlier, were increasingly gaining strength in trade unions and were themselves busy with the project first of a People's Party and subsequently of a Workers' and Peasants' Party. Their views regarding the Labour Party are contained in the writings of Roy.⁴

According to Roy the desirability or usefulness of such a party depended upon its programme, its methods, and its

1. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 106, also see, *Indian Annual Register*, 1926, Vol. I. p. 1.

3. *Indian Annual Register*, 1925, Vol. I, p. 19.

4. M. N. Roy: *Future of Indian Politics*, Chapters XIII & XIV, and M. N. Roy: *Aftermath of Non-Cooperation*, Chapter V.

attitude towards the struggle for national liberation. On all these scores, according to him, a Labour Party on the British model was undesirable in the existing social, economic and political circumstances of India.¹

According to Roy when the British Labour Party was formed it had as its basis a well-established trade union movement and, moreover, it was formed at a period of 'prosperity created by colonial plunder when Capitalists in Britain could afford to grant concessions to workers.'² Under the circumstances a non-revolutionary trade unionism restricting itself to principle of collective bargaining became the order of the day and formed the basis of the Labour Party.³ Moreover, in the late eighties and nineties of the last century when the theoretical foundation of the Labour Party was being laid down, the British constitution had been fully democratised and hence permitted the view to be held that in a democratic society and in a State which recognised the necessity of social legislation the conception of a social revolution was outmoded.⁴ Radically new political institutions were not called for since those already in existence were quite adequate for that purpose. It remained the task of the working class to evolve its own political organisation so that it might win the control of Parliament and thus be able to make constructive use of power so obtained.⁵

In India, said Roy, these preconditions were absent. Trade Unions were still in a state of immaturity and were not developed enough to give rise to a particular type of political party.⁶ Indian constitution was not democratic, there was no parliament,⁷ and 'there can't be parliamentarianism in a country without parliament.'⁸ Therefore,

1. Roy: *Aftermath of Non-Cooperation*, p. 34.

2. Roy: *Future of Indian Politics*, p. 107.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

a form of political organisation that might supposedly be useful for the proletariat in a country with democratic constitution could not be applicable to a country without the rudimentary elements of democratic freedom.¹

According to Roy what was needed in India was a revolutionary party that could fight for the establishment of freedom and democracy; a kind of programme, in fact, which the projected Party had shown no sign of adopting.

The second factor leading to the failure of the Labour Party was the attitude of the Indian National Congress and the nationalist leaders. The Indian National Congress regarded itself as a national organisation embracing all classes and communities of Indians. The view was, therefore, maintained that not only was there no place in it for any 'class' organisation but that even congressmen as such should neither encourage nor take leadership of any such organisation as they might jeopardise national unity and solidarity. To do so would run the risk of arousing ill-will between labour and capital, peasants and landlords, and while Congress, no doubt, had general sympathy with the grievances of peasants and workers, beyond this it was not prepared to go at that stage, though beginning with 1919 the Congress occasionally passed resolutions on the need to organise workers so as to bring them within the ambit of the national movement, and thus 'labour problem' featured at its annual sessions. A further limiting factor was that its policy towards workers and the peasantry was based on the Gandhian theory of 'trusteeship'—an outlook which expressed a belief in the essential harmony of capital and labour, regarding the capitalist or landlord not as an owner of property he held but only its trustee.

Underlying this 'Trusteeship' theory of Gandhi was the assumption of the ignorance and backwardness—cultural and otherwise, of the workers and, therefore, Gandhi was opposed to any utilisation of workers by 'cunning politicians' for political purposes. On these grounds

1. *Ibid.*

he was opposed to any political organisation of the workers, be it independent or otherwise. This point is elucidated by a highly instructive correspondence that took place between Communist Saklatvala and Gandhi.¹ As we have already seen Saklatvala had been sent by the British Communists in 1927 to organise communist activity in India.

Opening the correspondence in the form of an open letter Saklatvala criticised Gandhi for his attack upon industrial civilisation, 'upon machinery, upon physical sciences, upon material progress.'² He made a severe criticism of Gandhi's cult of the economy of Charkha (spinning wheel), adding that this would put the clock of history backwards and amounted to a positive disservice to the country. He also took issue with Gandhi over the latter's objection to Western methods of organising labour.³ Gandhi's objection to this had been that it would unnecessarily introduce class-war on Indian soil where "acute oppression of capitalists over labour does not exist."⁴ Saklatvala asserted that it was not the organisers of Labour who created class-struggle or class war but that it was rooted in the very texture of the capitalist society, and that Labour leaders, if anything, only did 'the great moral work of helping and strengthening the weaker of the two parties.'⁵ As regards the absence of class war in India, Saklatvala opined that it was present in India in a more virulent form than in most of the advanced European countries.⁶

He asked Gandhi not to busy himself with religious or metaphysical objects and to give a helping hand in organising Labour on principles which would be in conformity

1. *Indian Annual Register, 1927, Vol. I, p. 63; Is India Different? (Correspondence between Saklatvala and Gandhi).*
2. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*

with such movements in the West.¹ He also asked Gandhi to get the Ahmedabad Labour Union affiliated to the A.I.T.U.C.² He asked : were not modern trade unions struggling for "justice and right of workers to possess in common what they produce for common good?"³ He felt pained to find that labourers in Ahmedabad were living under conditions much worse than under employers of some European firms in Cawnpur and Calcutta and that the standard of wage was lower than in Bombay,⁴ despite the existence of the Mazdoor Mahajan based on Gandhian principles.

To the plea that the Indian workers were ignorant and backward, having difference of race, language, etc., and would, if organised on all-India level, be put into the hands of politicians, Saklatvala rejoined that this only showed how necessary it was to organise them and enlighten them with propaganda and education.⁵

In reply, Gandhi admitted the sincerity and sacrifice of Saklatvala, but informed him that he totally disagreed with his views.⁶ He decried the modern 'satanic civilisation', adding, "I don't believe that multiplication of wants, and the machinery contrived to supply them is taking the world a single step nearer in its goal I wholeheartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and

1. See, *Annual Register*, 1927, Vol. II, p. 119.

2. *The Ahmedabad Labour Union, called Mazdoor Mahajan, was originated by Gandhi in the midst of a strike struggle of workers for wages in 1920 on the new principles of labour unions which he advocated. (For fuller account, see, P. Sitaramayya: History of Indian National Congress, pp. 242-45; also see Dange: on Indian Trade Union Movement.) What appeared surprising to many labour leaders was that Gandhi did not encourage similar unions to be established in other parts of India. Neither did he ask it to affiliate to the A.I.T.U.C. even when nationalists like Lajpat Rai and C. R. Das (1920-22) or Nehru and Bose (1929-30) were its Presidents. Mazdoor Mahajan was based on principle of solving all disputes by arbitration and not by strikes.*

3. *Annual Register*, *Ibid.*

4. See, *Annual Register*, Vol. II, p. 121.

5. *Ibid.*

6. See, *Annual Register*, 1927, Vol. I, p. 69.

time and to increase animal appetites If modern civilisation stands for all this I call it satanic.”¹

He criticised Saklatvala for advocating more militant methods and observed : “We can’t reform a soulless system by violent means and without becoming soulless ourselves.”² Again, “What Com. Saklatvala believes to be my error and failure, I regard to be an expression of my strength and deep conviction.”³ The Khadi programme, he observed, was designed to help the poor and to create a moral and spiritual bond between the classes and masses.⁴

He was not opposed to the organization of labour but as in everything else, he wanted its organization along Indian lines since he didn’t regard capital as the enemy of labour.⁵ Labour organizations should not be anti-Capitalistic, and it was on this basis that Ahmedabad Labour Union was founded. The idea was to take from capital labour’s share and no more and this also not by paralysing capital but by reforms among the labourers from within and by their own self-consciousness; not again through cleverness and manoeuvring of non-labour leaders, but by educating labour to evolve its own leadership and its own self-reliant, self-existing organization. Its direct aim was not in the least political but internal reform and evolution of internal strength.⁶

This being the prevailing attitude of the Indian National Congress under Gandhi to labour and other class organizations, a few Congress politicians who took part in trade union activities did not do so in their capacity as Congressmen but only in their individual capacity. They held their prime allegiance to the National Congress and the cause of national freedom for which it stood, but they had also come into contact with the Labour Movement of

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. See, *Annual Register*, 1927, Vol. II, p. 117.

the West and were prone to see in labour a favourable force, not a hindrance to the national cause. They were in favour of labour taking part in any national movement provided this was done in peaceful and non-violent manner. In practice this did not amount to any conflict with the official Congress policy and programme, since their ideal of trade unionism was not based on any concept of class-struggle but on the principle of harmony between labour and capital and they themselves, (excepting men like Lala Lajpat Rai and others) were not in favour of a political party of labour in form of a Labour Party. According to this conception of things politically, if at all, the place of labour was in the Indian National Congress and not in any organization antagonistic or even parallel to the National Congress. Attracted by the labour movement of the West, none of them had fully embraced or understood its ideal. Their attraction had been largely based on national and philanthropic grounds. Their praise for either the B.T.U.C. or the Labour Party of Great Britain was not prompted by any admiration or appreciation for the work they had done for labour or the ideals of socialism for which they stood, and it is doubtful whether any of them understood the implications that lay beyond their partiality towards the labour movement.

This group had turned to the Labour Party in anticipation of its support and cooperation in the task of winning self-government and freedom for India. In this they did not differ from the earlier Indian nationalists who had put faith in the Liberal Party for the same purpose. An example is the case of the extremist leader, B. G. Tilak, who, though he had no sympathy with labour and labour movement as such, yet, donated £3,000 to the British Labour Party.¹

But even here there was a conflict of approach. The idea of the Labour Party was that Indians in general and the Indian National Congress in particular (in absence of

1. P. Sitaramayya : *History of National Congress*, p. 164.

any Labour Party) should cooperate with Reforms that had been offered to India under the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms and gradually qualify themselves for full-fledged Dominionship within the Empire. The Labour and the New Social Order adopted in 1918 spoke of "the progressive development of all parts of the 'Empire' on lines of 'Local Autonomy' and 'Home Rule All Round'.¹ In this view of things there was no place for non-cooperation or direct action. Parliamentaryism was to be the very breath of this new spirit and democratic cooperation the moving force. That is why the Labour Party opposed the Non-Cooperation Movement of Gandhi as well as the 'obstructionist' legislative policy of the Swaraj Party under C. R. Das.² Col. Wedgwood, who attended the Nagpur Session of the National Congress (1920), warned the Congress against the cult of Non-Cooperation: "You will make it difficult for your friends in England to take up your cause,"³ he said. In his view the Congress had made a lamentable blunder in refusing to go to the Councils. The Labour Party wanted them to go to the Councils and the Assembly to form part of the opposition to the Government until they could become the Government themselves.⁴

Despite these differences no immediate conflict arose over the differences of outlook between the Labour Party and these nationalist politicians working in the labour field. This was partly because of the fact that many of them, while affirming the fitness of India for self-government under the Commonwealth and, therefore, regarding the 1917 Reforms as 'unsatisfactory and disappointing', were in favour of working the Reforms for all they were worth.⁵ Hence they were not very enthusiastic supporters of the Non-Cooperation Movement of Gandhi. Also, the fact that the Labour Party in principle stood for self-government for

1. *Labour and the New Social Order*, 1918, p. 19.
2. *The Indian Annual Register*, 1925, Vol. I, p. 150.
3. P. Sitaramayya: *History of Indian National Congress*, p. 350.
4. *The Indian Annual Register*, 1922-23, p. 208.
5. P. Sitaramayya: *Indian National Congress*, p. 328.

India, helped to prevent an immediate conflict between itself and the nationalist politicians.

Real conflict, however, started to take shape from the year 1924 when the first Labour Government in Britain was formed. These labour leaders in India at once expected the new government to grant Self-Government and amidst the jubilation and the despatch of enthusiastic greetings, it was overlooked that this was a minority government.¹ However, even after sober reflections over the activities of the Labour Government the Indian leaders confessed their disappointment that under this government :

- (a) A Bengal Ordinance was promulgated empowering imprisonment of any suspected person without warrant.
 - (b) The Cawnpur Conspiracy Case against four Labour leaders was instituted.
 - (c) Firing was resorted to against Cawnpur strikers.²
- We must record that this was the first setback that the ideals of an Indian Labour Party received.

Towards the second half of the twenties there took place other developments which led to further estrangement. We will briefly summarise them. Firstly, on 27th July, 1925 there took place the Commonwealth Labour Conference which was attended by N. M. Joshi and Diwan Chamanlal, the two Labour leaders. Mr. Chamanlal wanted to move a resolution censoring the British Labour Party for co-operating with the Simon Commission but this was disallowed on the grounds that there was no precedent for this, whereupon the Indian delegates withdrew from the Conference.³

1. *The Annual Register*, 1928, p. 295.

Immediately after Labour took office G. Lansbury, in fact, sent a message to India asking friends not to expect too much from this minority government. (Ibid).

2. *The Indian Annual Register*, 1929, Vol. I, p. XVI.

3. *The Indian Annual Register*, 1928, Vol. II, News.

Secondly, there was the remonstrance of the Indian delegation to the International Socialist Conference¹ at Brussels on the 9th August, 1928. Diwan Chamanlal who represented Indian Labour, issued a lengthy statement blaming the International for pursuing a policy that was neither 'International nor Socialist'.² He criticised its Colonial Commission for its stand that "the Indian struggle for national freedom is essentially a national affair."³

In his Presidential address to the Cawnpur Session of the A.I.T.U.C. (1927) Diwan Chamanlal gave a vent to the prevalent attitude to the British Labour Party in India : "I must indeed warn the British Labour Party that in the eyes of the intelligent Indians today that Party stands thoroughly discredited. We have many friends of our cause in that Party I wish to say to these friends that their Party as a whole betrayed the confidence we placed in it."⁴

In the national political field itself some swift developments took place. After a lull of nearly six years, the nationalist movement again started gaining momentum—dating from 1927 when the Simon Commission was appointed. Nationalists were opposed to the appointment of this Commission on the ground that 'it violated the right of self-determination',⁵ and they wanted the Labour Party to refuse the invitation to appoint a representative to serve on it. This, they believed, was in consonance with the Resolution of the Blackpool Conference of the Labour Party (1927) which reaffirmed 'the right of the Indian people to full self-government and self-determination'⁶ and stipulated that the Commission be appointed in such a way that it "will enjoy the confidence and cooperation of the

1. For full report see, *Indian Annual Register*, 1928, Vol. II, p. 281.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Report*, p. 36.

5. V. P. Raghubanshy: *The Indian Nationalist Movement and Thought*, p. 192.

6. *Indian Annual Register*, p. 159..

Indian people.”¹ These leaders asserted that this condition was not fulfilled.

By the way, it was this frustration of their nationalist urges and aspirations which gradually made the Left-wing Congressmen turn to Soviet Russia and to Marxism.

Due to cumulative effect of these factors and developments, an Indian Labour Party could not come through.

The Sixth Congress of C.I. and the turn in Communist activity

Before we turn to other developments we have to take note of the new Thesis which the Communist International adopted at its Sixth World Congress held in Moscow from July 17 to September 1, 1928. For while it is true to say that a severe blow was dealt to Communism by the Meerut Conspiracy Case, a great turn in communist activity towards ‘left-sectarianism’ took place as a result of the application of this Thesis. This, more than anything else, led to the isolation of the communists from the general mass of the nationalist movement in 1929-33 and did unbounded damage to their activity.

The Indians who attended the Congress were : Usmani, Luhani, Saumyendranath Tagore, Md. Shafiq, H. A. Naseem and Masood Ali Shah. In addition, C. P. Dutt also represented India. Usmani participated in the debates under the pseudo name Sikander Sur, and Tagore as Narayan. But none of them represented the C.P.I. As already referred, Tagore had been Secretary of the Bengal W. & P. P. Tagore was the grandson of Dwijendranath Tagore, Rabin-dranath Tagore’s eldest brother. During the non-cooperation days he gave up his studies while in his M.A. class, and became a follower of Gandhi but soon lost his faith in Gandhism. He joined the Labour Swaraj Party in 1926 and when the Party changed itself into the W. & P. P., he continued to be in it. In February, 1927 he was elected its Secretary and in the same year he also joined the C.P.I.

1. *Ibid.*

In the meanwhile, he came in contact with Nalini Gupta who had just been released after serving his sentence in Cawnpur Conspiracy Case. Gupta succeeded in persuading Tagore to go to Europe as a representative only of the W. & P. P. and not of the C.P.I.¹ Tagore left for abroad partly on this prompting and partly to avoid prosecution. Muzaffar Ahmad maintains that he never informed the Party of his intention to go abroad, and when it was known that he was going, he was called for discussion by the Party, but he did not respond.² Ahmad also maintains that he had no real knowledge of the communist movement in India and his assertion in his booklet 'Historical Development of the Communist Party of India' that there was no Communist Party of India in 1927 was false and motivated. Ahmad was one of the supporters of Tagore at this stage and his observations are interesting : "However, in spite of whatever we did for his sake, he did not truly have the right to be our representative. He knew a little about conditions in Bengal but he was completely ignorant about the rest of India. Besides, he had not even discussed things with us in order that he might present a good report while he was abroad. And yet he concocted some sort of a report and placed it before the Communist International. In this matter he trod in the footsteps of M. N. Roy."³

The credentials of Usmani and his associates were even more doubtful. He had left India in June, 1928 along with Habib Ahmad Naseem, Masood Ali Shah and Muhammad Shafiq. In this case also the prop was Shah. He had proposed to the C.P.I. to be sent as a representative to the C.I. but the Party did not agree. Thereafter he and his comrades went on their own, without even informing the Party.⁴ They had reached Moscow just on the eve of the

1. *M. Ahmad: Opt. Cit., p. 161.*

2. *Ibid, p. 161.*

3. *Ibid, 165.*

4. *Opt. Cit., 93. Ahmad avers that Masood Ali Shah was a government spy. He is supported by Ghate (vide interview with the author). Shah and Naseem were later shot dead in Moscow, probably on the charges of espionage.*

Congress. The other Indian Luhan, a close associate of Roy for long, had been long out of touch with the conditions in India. No wonder their reports were considered unrealistic by the communists in India, and this might have been one of the reasons why the C.P.I. took some time to adjust to the new C.I. line, the other probable reason being that the majority of C.P.G.B. delegates, who had been closely associated with the Indian communist activity in the years immediately preceding the Congress, dissented from the official line. Moreover, the absence of Roy from the Congress, coupled with the vestigial 'nationalism' of the local communists, also had to do with the delay.

In the discussions of the Sixth Congress the role and importance of Colonial revolution 'from the point of view of struggle against imperialism' loomed large.¹ Indeed a stronger emphasis than in the previous drafts was laid on the Colonial problems at this Congress. In these discussions on the projected revolution the role of India was particularly emphasized. Kuusinen held that revolutionary crisis would develop in India in not distant future. But as at the Second Congress, at this Congress too, there raged a fierce controversy over the Colonial Thesis, especially in regard to the situation in India.

Generally speaking, what had influence over shaping the tactical line was the experiences in China and the 'counter-revolution' there, the 'approaching imperialist war' against the U.S.S.R. and contradiction inside the Capitalist world itself, manifesting itself in the World Economic crisis, the conflict of interests between the U.K. and the U.S.A. and antagonism between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries.²

In formulating a programme of action for the Indian Communists the International was guided by two factors :

1. *The International Press Correspondence, 6th June, 1928.*
2. *The International Press Correspondence, 6th June, 1928; Communism and International Situation, p. 25.*

- (1) The failure of the revolution in China which was attributed to the 'counter-revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie'.¹ This led to the reformation of that part of the Fourth Congress Colonial Thesis which advanced the policy of collaboration with, and support to, the national movements.
- (2) The situation in India itself, where a new political agitation starting with the boycott of the Simon Commission under the Left-wing of the Congress was taking place, accompanied by a wave of strikes among the workers and unrest among the peasants.

From these the conclusion was drawn that communists should not miss this 'highly revolutionary opportunity' but at the same time prepare to assert the independent role of the proletariat.² An Indian Communist writing in the International Press Correspondence (15th December, 1927) had already observed : "The situation created in India now is certainly rich with revolutionary possibilities. The only safeguard against their degeneration into reformist compromise is energetic and concerted action by Nationalist Left Wing and the Workers' and Peasants' Party.' Usmani, an Indian delegate to the Congress, said : "We must establish strong disciplined Communist Parties so that when the long expected crisis comes, it may not find ourselves in confusion."³

But while there was a general agreement with this characterisation of India in a state of revolutionary ferment, there was another aspect of the situation in India in regard to which there was a great controversy and which led to formulation of differing views on the Colonial Thesis. This was with respect to the description of the imperial colonial policy (both economic and political). The main point of contention was whether as a result of a change in Britain's

attitude a rapid industrialization and, therefore, a 'decolonization' was taking place in India, or whether Britain's policy continued as of old.

The first point of view, generally speaking, had been taken by Roy (though he himself was not present at this Congress), a majority of British delegates and a number of delegates from India who, however, differentiated themselves from the decolonization theory of Roy.¹ The second was the official view of the C.I. as embodied in the Draft Colonial Programme presented by Kuusinen who himself agreed that he was not an expert in the game. From their stand the advocates of the first view drew the conclusion that since this industrialization had been effected by a workable compromise between the Indian and the British 'bourgeoisie', the Indian bourgeoisie was no longer a revolutionary class; on the contrary, it had gone over to the ranks of the counter-revolution. The resolution which the British delegation moved at the end of the Congress in the form of an amendment read : "In India the bourgeois revolution has already reached the stage when it is no longer possible for the Indian bourgeoisie to enter the national revolutionary camp. The Communist Party of India leading the proletarian masses and toilers has to fight on two fronts : against the camp of British Imperialism and the camp of national bourgeoisie."² This theory held that the impending revolution could take place only under the hegemony of the proletariat. They also held that to deny the fact of industrialization in India was to deny the existence of the proletarian class-struggle, and the importance of the revolutionary situation, and of the revolutionary party of the proletariat.

Writing in 1927 R. P. Dutt, in his book 'Modern India', maintained : "The Indian bourgeoisie is today a counter-revolutionary force : they fear the social revolution that would follow on national independence more than they

1. *The I.P.C.*, 4th October, 1928.

2. *The I.P.C.*, 30th October, 1928.

desire independence; and, therefore, they have made their terms with the imperialists and are all supporters of the Empire. The imperialists have given bait of industrial development and promises of gradual constitutional reforms.”¹

As the debates developed the British delegation took pains to point out that it did not support the un-Marxian theory of ‘decolonization’ in the sense of assuming that the British Capitalists were likely to loosen their tight political control of the colonies, substituting for it an alliance between the British bourgeoisie and the Colonial bourgeoisie on the basis of increased self-government.² They maintained that the issue was not colonization vrs. decolonization, but carrying on industrialization under British control. The simple meaning they attached to the term industrialization was growth of Capitalist industry.³

At the end, the British delegation voted against the thesis. In declaration made later it maintained that they voted against the thesis because of the following : (a) The thesis based its analysis on a picture of the transformation of the colonies into the agrarian hinterland of the metropolis, (b) It gave a totally one-sided and historically incorrect picture, (c) It blurred distinction between era of classic capitalism and era of imperialism, (d) It led to politically wrong and dangerous conclusion of a long prospect of vacillation of Colonial bourgeoisie.⁴ It also protested against the polemical language of Kuusinen.

The official view was that the Indian bourgeoisie was playing a vacillating role and that it had not already gone over to the rank of counter-revolution, though it was most likely to do so in near future.⁵ The bourgeoisie was described as national reformist. According to it “the weak

1. R. P. Dutt : *Modern India*, p. 17.
2. *Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies*, introduction by J. R. Campbell.
3. I.P.C. : *Debates on Colonial Thesis*, p. 1422.
4. I.P.C., 27th December, 1928.
5. *The I.P.C.*, 7th June, 1928.

native bourgeoisie again and again capitulates to imperialism but this capitulation is never final unless the danger of class revolution becomes immediate and acute." As at the Second Congress, it was maintained that it was tactically wrong not to utilise the bourgeoisie in its role of opposition to imperialism, which, in the official view-point it was still capable of accomplishing. Although this opposition was not revolutionary but reformist and class-collaborationist in character, it by no means signified that it had no special significance. The advocates of this view did not deny that industrial development of India had taken place but what they wanted to deny was that this was due to any change in the Colonial policy of Britain.¹ Moreover, they maintained that the capitalist enterprises created by the imperialists in the colonies were predominantly or exclusively of an agrarian capitalist character and were distinguished by a low organic composition of capital. Real industrialization of the Colonial countries, in particular of the building up of a flourishing engineering industry, which might make possible an independent development of the productive forces of the country, was not accelerated, but, on the contrary, was hindered by the monopolies. This was the essence of Colonial enslavement.² They further maintained that if it was true that Britain had adopted the course of industrialization in India, leading to 'decolonization', then the entire conception of C.I. towards characterisation of imperial colonial policy would have to be reversed, since decolonization had its political consequences of assuming that 'British Capitalists were likely to loosen their present tight control of the Colonies,' and that, therefore, freedom for India was being brought about through the imperial policy.³

The holders of this view also, like the first, maintained that the Revolutionary movement in the Colonies was to

1. *The I.P.C., 4th October, 1928. Kuusinen's Report.*
2. *Revolutionary movement in the colonies, p. 14,*
3. *Ibid.*

be under the hegemony of the proletariat. "The Liberation of India is a mission for which history has destined the Indian Proletariat and Peasantry."¹ Therefore, it enjoined upon the communists to propagate the idea of independence of the proletariat as a class which on principle was hostile to the bourgeoisie.² It was necessary to reject the formation of any kind of bloc with reformist bourgeoisie. But this hostility did not preclude the possibility of temporary agreements with the bourgeoisie, and the coordinating of separate activities in connection with definite anti-imperialist demonstrations provided that these demonstrations of the bourgeois opposition could be utilised for the development of the mass movement and did not limit freedom of the Communist Parties. One of the chief results of the deliberations of this Congress was to emphasize the independent political role of the proletariat and, therefore, the communists were asked to come out of the National Congress and build a strong independent Communist Party. It was held that only under the leadership of the proletariat would the bloc of workers, peasants and the revolutionary sections of the intelligentsia be in a position to smash the bloc of imperialist landlords and compromising bourgeoisie, release agrarian revolution and break the imperialist front in India.

A comprehensive plan of action adopted for the guidance of Communist Parties in Colonial and semi-Colonial countries enumerated the following tasks :

- (1) 'Overthrow of the rule of feudal rulers, of the landlord bureaucracy and of foreign imperialism.'
- (2) 'To establish the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasant.'
- (3) 'To secure complete national independence and national unity.'

1. *Ibid.*

2. *I.P.C.*, 6th June, 1928.

- (4) 'To nationalise large enterprises (industrial, banking, transport and others) belonging to imperialists.'
- (5) 'Establishment of a Society of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies : establishment of Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat'.¹

Its resolution, entitled 'the Revolutionary Movement for Colonies and semi-Colonies', read :

"The basic tasks of the Indian Communists consist in struggle against Imperialism for the emancipation of the country. The union of all Communist groups and individual communist groups scattered throughout the country into a single, illegal, independent and centralised party represents the first task of the Indian Communists. The Communists must unmask the national reformism of the Indian National Congress and oppose all the phases of the Swarajists, Gandhites, etc. about passive resistance. It must be remembered that under no circumstances can the communists relinquish their right to open criticism of the leadership of those mass organizations in which they work."² But the thesis cautioned that this exposure of the national reformist bourgeoisie should not be attempted in a careless, hasty, noisy phrases, but through carefully calculated tactics, otherwise it would be easy for the bourgeoisie to expose the communists as the enemy of the nation. Its reference to Gandhism was of special significance : "Gandhism was more and more becoming an ideology directed against mass revolution. It must be strongly combated by Communism."

1. *Revolutionary Movement in Colonies*, p. 22.

2. See, *Communism and International Situation, Thesis of the Sixth Congress*, p. 23. '

Under the heading "Communist strategy in China and similar Colonial countries" the same resolution further declared :

"As in all Colonial and semi-Colonial countries and also in China and India, the development of productive forces and socialization of labour stand at comparatively low level. In the revolutionary movement of these countries the following kinds of tasks can be pointed out. Emancipation of the country from the yoke of imperialism and establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat strengthening of the Communist Party and its conquest of a firm leading position among the toiling masses."

"The bourgeoisie of China, India and Egypt attempts by means of empty nationalist phrases and gestures to keep the petty-bourgeois masses under its influence and to induce imperialism to grant certain concessions.

"Without the liberation of the toiling masses from the influence of the bourgeois and national reformism, the basic strategical aim of the Communist Movement in the bourgeois-democratic revolution can't be achieved.

"In India, Egypt, etc. it is necessary to carry through much work in the building up and consolidation of the Communist Party and Trade Union organizations of the proletariat in the winning over of the masses and their liberation from the influence of the national reformist bourgeoisie.

"It is necessary by means of correct communist tactics, adapted to the conditions of the present stage, to help the toiling masses in India to emancipate themselves from the bourgeois parties."

The Congress decided against the continuation of the Workers' and Peasants' Parties on the plea that they were

two class parties, but, at the same time it called for a fighting bloc of the proletariat and peasantry. "Special 'Workers' and Peasants' Parties', whatever revolutionary character they may possess, can too easily, at particular periods, be converted into ordinary petty-bourgeois parties, and, accordingly, communists are not recommended to organise such parties. The Communist Party can never build its organization on the basis of a fusion of two classes, and in the same way also it can't make it its task to organise other parties on this basis, which is characteristic of petty bourgeois groups. The fighting bloc of the masses of workers and peasants can find expression in carefully prepared and periodically convened joint conferences and congresses of representatives of revolutionary peasant unions (or their committees) and of trade unions."¹

It further maintained : " While rejecting the principle of the building of the Party on a two-class basis, the communists must utilise the connections of the existing Workers' and Peasants' Parties with the toiling masses."²

It went on : " The union of all communist groups and individual communists scattered throughout the country into a single, illegal, independent and centralised party represents the first task of the Indian Communists."³

The British delegates, supported by the Bengal W. & P. P.'s representative Tagore, cast serious doubts on the efficacy of this approach and held that the W. & P. P. could not be so summarily dismissed. Bennet of the British delegation maintained that the characteristic feature of these parties was that in the existing stage of development in India W. & P. P. formed an important route through which the communists found their way to the masses.⁴

An interesting sidelight of the Congress was the objection of Tagore to that part in the Colonial thesis which

1. *Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies*, p. 45.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

4. *I.P.C.*, discussion on the Colonial Thesis, p. 1425.

held that the Colonial movements of the proletariat should march under the leadership of the revolutionary proletarian movement in the imperialist home countries. To Tagore it meant subordination of the Colonial party to the leadership of the party of the imperialist home country. "The only leadership acceptable to us is the leadership of the Communist International", Tagore observed.

However, as a result of these decisions and directions, the Communist Party, after months of indecision and vacillation, made a complete reorientation of its policy which was later incorporated into the Platform of Action of C.P. of India (1930), the full implications of which we shall delineate in the next chapter.

Meerut Conspiracy Case

The year 1929 opened with a critical note in respect of the communist movement. If the Jharia session of the A.I.T.U.C. demonstrated their strength inside the trade unions, the first annual conference of the W. & P. P. at Calcutta revealed them as a factor of growing political significance. At the time of the first all-India conference of the W. & P. P. at Calcutta, the C.P.I. was reorganized and a new Central Executive was constituted. S. S. Mirajkar, K. N. Joglekar, S. A. Dange, R. S. Nimbkar, S. V. Ghate, Muzaffar Ahmad, Abdul Halim, Shamsul Huda, Abdul Mazed and Sohan Singh Josh had been elected its members and Ghate was again appointed General Secretary. Discussions were held on the new Comintern line but no final decisions were taken. During the early months of 1929 the communists planned to consolidate their position in both these spheres. In the political field discussions went on for reorientation of their policies, strategies and tactics in the light of the deliberations and resolutions of the Sixth World Congress of the C.I., and they were to assemble together in the second half of March, 1929 for the finalisation of their programme. In the trade union field the policy of relentless class-struggle was being pursued all the more vigorously. Apart from the growing economic

disadvantages for the workers which continued to provide incentives for strikes, the protests and demonstrations against the Simon Commission and the Trades Disputes Bill (1928) persisted. A further occasion for protest meetings and demonstrations that took place in January-March, 1929 was provided by the appointment of the Whitley Commission to enquire into labour conditions in India. The communists raised loud revolutionary slogans against the Commission. Early in March, 1929, under the leadership of the Girni Kamgar Union, the textile workers decided to resume the general strike. The situation thus was full of revolutionary potentialities.

In January, 1929 M. G. Desai, a journalist under the influence of Communism, who had returned from England in November, 1928, started a paper called "Spark" whose first issue appeared on 27th January, 1929 and the last on 10th March, 1929. The paper was full of articles and views of extreme revolutionary nature.

The proposed C.P.I. meeting took place on March 17-19, 1929. It was attended by important communists like Dange, Usmani, Mirajkar, Nimbkar, Joglekar, Ghate, Adhikari etc. It was devoted to a consideration of the question of relationship of the C.P. with the W. & P. P. and the question as to how to proceed with the organization of C.P. in the light of the Sixth Congress thesis. In case of the W. & P. P. both Mirajkar and Usmani maintained that the dissolution of the W. & P. P. was wrong but others supported the C.I. line. While the confabulations on this point remained inconclusive due to sudden arrests in Meerut Conspiracy Case, there was general agreement on an intensive organization of the C.P. in five departments, namely, trade unions, peasants, agitation and propaganda, organizational and political. A blue-print in this respect had been presented by Adhikari. But formulation of concrete programme even in respect of these remained inconclusive.¹

1. Meerut Documents; Judgment of Yorke.

While the local communists were still indecisive, the British communists were not openly against the W. & P. P. A Communist P. Sch, writing on 29th March, 1929 still favoured the W. & P. P. and maintained : "The Workers' and Peasants' Parties, despite uncertainty of their tactical line, in spite of vacillation and many errors, are gaining support."¹

Similarly, R. P. Dutt still seemed to favour the W. & P. P. and the March, 1929 issue of his Labour Monthly contained the Thesis of the Workers' and Peasants' Party of India adopted at Calcutta. The editor's note on it maintained that despite some features which did not take note of the Sixth Congress discussions, and despite the dangers inherent in such a party, the thesis was of great interest.

The growing communist influence constituted a real danger to society in the eyes of the Government and the millowners. Beginning with April, 1928 the millowners started pressing the Government for action. Both the Government of Bombay and Government of Bengal, the two main centres of communist activity, urged the Central Government to take stern action to checkmate the communist menace. The Central Government finally decided to take action in January, 1929. The sub-committee of the Executive Council meeting on the 8th January, 1929 approved of the idea of launching a conspiracy case so that, among others, judicial opinion regarding the menace of Communism might be known. In taking this decision the Government regretfully noted that in India there was nobody to stand up to the communists; the moderate trade unionists had been hoodwinked by the communists, the millowners had no effective counter-propaganda machinery, and the political leaders were busy abusing the Government. The decisions of the Government were

1. I.P.C., 29th March, 1929, P. Sch : *Revolutionary Crisis in India and English terrorism.*

communicated to the Legislative Assembly in January, 1929 when the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, declared in a speech that 'the disquieting spread of communist doctrines had been causing anxiety and that the Government would take measures'.

The measures came on the 20th March, 1929 when, under instructions from the Government of India, were arrested thirty-one prominent labour leaders in different parts of India and were brought to Meerut for trial, and thus commenced the famous Meerut Conspiracy Case. The accused were :

S. A. Dange : Assistant Secretary, A.I.T.U.C., General Secretary of the Girni Kamgar Union, General Secretary of the Tramwaymen's Union in Bombay; and a leading member of the W. & P. P.

Muzaffar Ahmad : Vice-President, A.I.T.U.C., Vice-President, Calcutta Scavengers' Union; Secretary, W. & P. P., Bengal.

S. V. Ghate : Vice-President, Bombay Municipal Workers' Union; Treasurer, Girni Kamgar Union; Executive member of All-India W. & P. P.

Kishorilal Ghosh : Secretary, Bengal Provincial Federation of Trade Unions; Official of the Calcutta Press Employees' Association and the Barua Jute Workers' Union, Secretary, Indian Journalists' Association; Assistant Editor, Amrit Bazar Patrika.

D. R. Thengdi : Executive member, and President in 1923, A.I.T.U.C., and elected delegate to the World Congress of League Against Imperialism; President, Kirkee Arsenal Workers' Union, Poona; member, A.I.C.C.

K. N. Joglekar : Assistant Secretary of Girni Kamgar Union; Organising Secretary, G.I.P. Railway Union; Executive member, W. & P. P.; member, A.I.C.C.

S. H. Jhabwalla : Vice-President, Girni Kamgar Union; General Secretary, G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union; Organising Secretary, All-India Railwaymen's Federation.

Shaukat Usmani : A Hijrati; associated with W. & P. P.

Philip Spratt : Executive member, A.I.T.U.C.; Executive member, W. & P. P.; took an active part in the Lilloah Railway strike and in the Jute workers' strike in Bengal.

B. F. Bradley : Member of the Executive of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union and of the Girni Kamgar Union; Executive member of All-India W. & P. P.

S. S. Mirajkar : Secretary, British India Steam Navigation Co. Staff Union; Secretary, Bombay W. & P. P.

Dharambir Singh : A member of the United Provinces Legislative Council; and Vice-President of the U.P. and Delhi W. & P. P.

P. C. Joshi : Secretary, U.P. W. & P. P.; Executive member, All-India W. & P. P.; Editor of *Krantikari*, a vernacular newspaper of the Party. A student of Law at the Allahabad University.

A. A. Alwe : A textile operator; President, Girni Kamgar Union.

R. Kasle : An official of the Girni Kamgar Union.

Gopal Basak : An official of the Bengal Textile Union; President of Socialist Youth Conference, December, 1928.

G. M. Adhikari : A Doctor of Engineering from Germany. Wrote an article in the Bombay socialist paper 'Spark'.

Abdul Mazid : A Hijrati; active in the Punjab.

R. S. Nimbkar : Secretary, Bengal Provincial Congress Committee; General Secretary, A.I. W. & P. P.; President, Bombay Oil Company Employees' Union; Vice-President, Girni Kamgar Union.

Dr. V. N. Mukherjee : President of the U.P. and Delhi W. & P. P.

K. N. Sehgal : President, Punjab Naujawan Bharat Sabha; member, A.I.C.C.; Financial Secretary, Punjab Provincial Congress Committee.

R. R. Mitra : General Secretary of the Bengal Jute Workers' Union.

Gauri Shanker : Member, W. & P. P.

D. Goswami : Member, W. & P. P.

S. Huda : Secretary of the Transport Workers' Union of Bengal and member of W. & P. P.

S. N. Banerjee : Member, W. & P. P.; President, Jute Workers' Association.

G. Chakravarty : Member, W. & P. P.; an official of E.I. Railway Union; Secretary, Bhatpara Branch of the Bengal Jute Workers' Union.

S. S. Josh : President of the first A.I. W. & P. P. Conference in December, 1928.

M. G. Desai : Journalist, Editor of the 'Spark', a socialist paper.

Ayodhya Prasad : Worker in the labour movement.

L. R. Kadam : Organised Municipal Workers' Union at Jhansi.

The thirty-second accused, arrested in June, 1929, was Lester Hutchinson. He was editor of the W. & P. P. paper, the *New Spark*.¹ Of the accused only 14 were communists.

The arrests were made under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code which declares :

"Whoever within or without British India conspires to commit any of the offences punishable by Section 121 or to deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India or any part thereof, or conspires to overawe, by means of criminal force or the show of criminal force, the Government of India or any local Government, shall be punished with transportation for life or any shorter term, or with imprisonment of either description which may extend to ten years."

The following is the official statement of the charge-sheet :

"The complaint of Mr. R. A. Horton, Officer on Special Duty under the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India, sheweth :

1. *C. Dutt: Conspiracy against the King, p. 19.*

1. That there exists in Russia an organization called the Communist International. The aim of this organization is, by creation of armed revolution, to overthrow all the existing forms of government throughout the world and to replace them by Soviet Republics subordinate to, and controlled by, the Central Soviet administration in Moscow.

2. That the said Communist International carries on its work and propaganda through various committees, branches, and organizations, controlled by and subject to itself, e.g., the Executive Committee of the Communist International (E.C.C.I.), and various sub-committees of the same, including a sub-committee concerned with Eastern and Colonial Affairs (Colonial Bureau); the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.), which is a section of the Communist International; the Red International of Labour Unions (R.I.L.U.), the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, the League Against Imperialism, the Young Communist League (Y.C.L.) and various other bodies.

3. That the ultimate object of the said Communist International is the complete paralysis and overthrow of existing Governments in every country (including India) by means of a general strike and armed uprising. It has outlined a programme or plan of campaign which should be followed for the achievement of this ultimate objective. Among the methods so ordained are :

- (a) The incitement of antagonism between Capital and Labour.
- (b) The creation of Workers' and Peasants' Parties, Youth Leagues, Unions, etc, ostensibly for the benefits of the members thereof, but in fact for the purpose of propaganda; the domination of such parties by communists pledged to support the aims of the Communist International and the unification of such bodies under one control subservient to the Communist International.
- (c) The introduction of factions or nuclei of such communists with illegal objects as aforesaid into

existing trade unions, nationalist bodies and political and other organizations, with the object of capturing the same or obtaining their support in the interests of the Communist International.

- (d) The encouragement of strikes, hartals, and agitation.
- (e) Propaganda by speeches, literature, newspapers, the celebration of anniversaries connected with the Russian Revolution, etc., etc.
- (f) The utilisation and encouragement of any movements hostile to the Government.

4. That in the year 1921 the said Communist International determined to establish a branch organization in British India, and the accused Sripad Amrit Dange, Shaukat Usmani and Muzaffar Ahmad entered into a conspiracy with certain other persons to establish such branch organization with a view to deprive the King Emperor of his sovereignty of British India.

5. That, thereafter, various persons, including the accused Philip Spratt and Benjamin Francis Bradley were sent to India by the Communist International through the medium of one of its branches or organizations, and with the object of furthering the aims of the Communist International.

6. That the accused named in this complaint reside in different centres throughout British India. They have conspired with each other, or with other persons known or unknown within or without British India, to deprive the King Emperor of the sovereignty of British India, and for such purpose to use the methods and carry out the programme and plans of campaign outlined and ordained by the Communist International, and in fact, they used such methods and carried out such plan of campaign with the assistance of, and financial support from, the Communist International.

7. That the accused have met and conspired together as aforesaid at various places within and without British

India, and among others at Meerut, and in pursuance of such conspiracy as aforesaid, the accused formed a Workers' and Peasants' Party at Meerut and there held a conference thereof.

8. That the above named accused have committed an offence under Section 121-A of the I.P.C. and within the jurisdiction of this court.

It is, therefore, prayed that the court will enquire into the above named offence."¹

The choice of Meerut as the place for launching a conspiracy was curious. Only two of the accused hailed from Meerut, and twenty-four of them had never been there. Officially choice of Meerut was justified on the ground that in 1928 a conference of the Workers' and Peasants' Party had taken place there. But the real motive behind the choice was that at Meerut there was no trial by jury; and Bombay and Calcutta, the two centres of the alleged conspiracy, were too much scenes of frequent strikes, for a conspiracy case to take place peacefully.

Critique of Gandhism

Before closing this chapter we have to take note of a critique of Gandhism. A Marxist critique of Gandhi and Gandhism at this period was C. G. Shah whose booklet 'Hundred Percent Indian' was a Marxist attack on Gandhi.² A characteristic feature of Communism in India is its critical attitude to Gandhi and Gandhism. Though Lenin did not agree with his characterisation, but already at the Second Congress M. N. Roy took a critical note of Gandhism. Dange provided an indigenous variety in his Gandhi vrs. Lenin. Roy became a more vocal and more persistent critic of Gandhism after the withdrawal of the non-cooperation. Saklatvala's diatribes have already been referred to. At the Sixth Congress a very critical attitude to Gandhism was taken. Gandhism has been subjected to a two-pronged

1. C. Dutt : *Conspiracy against the King*, p. 6.

2. C. G. Shah : *Marxism, Gandhism, Stalinism*; *Hundred Percent Indian* is included as a reprint in the work.

attack. On the one hand its theoretical postulates like idealism, moral asceticism, religiosity, irrationalism, non-violence, raising it to a creed, cult of Charkha, theory of trusteeship, and anti-machine-civilisation attitude etc have been assailed. On the other hand, the technique of Gandhi as the leader of the nationalist movement was particularly attacked. C. G. Shah's was, undoubtedly, a pioneer attempt in this direction. His Hundred Percent Indian was a criticism of Gandhi's ideas as expounded in his 'Hind Swaraj'.

Shah dubbed Gandhism as essentially a reactionary philosophy.¹ "Gandhism is the last flash, the most concentrated expression, of the steadily declining religio-mystical 'culture' and feudal petty-bourgeois socio-economic philosophy of Ancient India."² It was a retrogressive, non-social, ultra-individualistic philosophy, extremely unscientific and anti-progressive. It was merely a restatement of the theories, beliefs, doctrines, and principles which prevailed in India in the past and were the ideal product of the social conditions of those early epochs. But the Indian society changed radically after the British conquest, and new social forces developed in India which required different philosophies to explain them, to interpret them, to organise and guide them towards higher future development. What was now needed was not metaphysical, individualistic, religio-mystical philosophies of the past, but scientific, rationalist social philosophies of modern times.³

Shah criticised the idealistic interpretation of Indian history adopted by Gandhi, and held that the method of Historical Materialism was the only true approach. The essential urge of all life is material and all history has been developing on a material basis.⁴

He criticised Gandhi's antipathy to the contemporary machine-based science-made Western civilisation and his

1. *Op. Cit.*, p. 275.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

4. *Op. Cit.*, p. 255.

abhorrence of the material needs of life. "If the absence of desire be the classic test of all greatness, if reduction of want be the criterion of all progress, is not the animal . . . superior to man?"¹ The negation of science and repudiation of machinery would destroy the very basic conditions for the existence and growth of any kind of culture.

Gandhism believed in absolute principles of morality and truth. But to Shah moral ideas are rooted in the material, socio-economic environment of man, and in proportion that this socio-economic environment of man changes, his consciousness changes and his moral conceptions are modified.

Shah, thus, summed up his criticism of Gandhism : "All social, political, and economic programmes of hundred percent Indians and their international supporters, based on the negation of these forces, based on anti-machine, anti-scientific and anti-materialistic prejudices, will not succeed in realising their reactionary goal of rehabilitating the social systems, philosophies and outlooks of life of previous ages."²

Conclusion

The period between 1923-29 was one of rising Communism and militant trade unionism. While the communists came to have a predominant position in the trade unions, in the political field they were not so successful. Government launched three conspiracy cases against them which again and again paralysed their activity, but it speaks of their unswerving fidelity to the cause and of their dogged determination that they recovered after every onslaught.

Apart from the above, their slow development in the political field can be partly explained in terms of the backwardness of the country; religious, caste-temperament of the people; illiteracy of the workers and their being under the control of the liberal trade union leaders; the sway of

1. *Op. Cit.*, p. 251.

2. *Op. Cit.*, p. 274.

the National Congress over the people and their preoccupation with nationalism etc.

Paucity of funds was a major obstacle during this period. Communist leaders like Spratt, Dange, Muzaffar Ahmad have spoken of the stringent financial conditions under which they had to work. Money, no doubt, came from foreign sources, but it was not enough and there were some cases of misappropriation.

A further limiting factor was the low ideological level of the communist worker. An intelligence report prepared in 1928 maintained : "It is doubtful, however, whether the indigenous labour agitator is a communist at heart. He is ordinarily a man of little education, who has acquired a smattering of Bolshevik theory and who is able to impress the ignorant workers with violent harangues interlarded with the catchwords and slogans employed by the communist tub-thumper." Ill-digested Marxism was for long a bane of Indian Communism.

Moreover, the communists did not have the advantage of a clear-cut political line. The idea of the emigre communists varied from time to time. Towards the last years of this period the idea of a legal, Revolutionary Nationalist Party and an illegal C.P. gained ground.

But even here they were not clear as to how the Revolutionary Nationalist Party would arise : whether it would coincide with the existing Congress organization, furnished with a new programme and a new leadership, or whether it would come forth as a completely organised party within the Congress to transform and capture it. The main work of the organization of the C.P.I. suffered a lot in the process.

The communists employed various methods and devices to spread their influence. Firstly, they carried propaganda through public meetings. Occasionally meetings were organised by the communists for the direct purpose of communist propaganda but more often communist doctrines were introduced at meetings held for

other purposes, that is, opposition to Simon Commission etc. Secondly, they associated themselves with the other anti-government movements, particularly the Congress, and the meetings and conferences associated with them. Thirdly, they associated themselves with the rapidly growing student and youth movements in the country, like the Naujawan Bharat Sabha of the Punjab, founded by legendary martyr Bhagat Singh. The communists had also their own Young Comrades' League. Fourthly, propaganda was carried through newspapers and pamphlets, Indian as well as foreign. Fifthly, occasional appeals and manifestos were issued.

The conspiracy cases launched against the communists dealt a severe blow to their activities during the period.

CHAPTER FOUR

Communism (March 1929—March 1934)

The first years after the Meerut Conspiracy Case were the most difficult and most critical for the Indian Communists. Almost all their experienced and tried leaders were in jail, and the responsibility of leadership fell on to the shoulders of the younger members, who showed a combination of enthusiasm and unreality, characteristic of the newly converted. Firstly, they had to deal with the revision of their programme in the light of the decisions of the Sixth Congress of the International and build them into a new programme or platform for action. Secondly, they had to define their attitude to the National Congress and its left-wing, as also towards the new outburst of nationalist upsurge—perhaps the greatest that ever occurred in India—that took the form of the Civil Disobedience Movements under the leadership of the Indian National Congress and its undisputed leader, Mahatma Gandhi. Thirdly, they had to bear the responsibility of the defence of the Meerut prisoners arrested in connection with the Meerut Conspiracy Case. And last, they had to formulate their attitude to the Roy Group that emerged during this period. We shall consider the Meerut trial first.

The Meerut Trial

The trial lasted for 3½ years, the judgment being awarded by Justice Yorke on the 16th January, 1933. Over 1,000 books and newspapers were filed among the 3,000 exhibits by the prosecution, and about 320 witnesses were examined. Hearing proper of the case lasted from January, 1930 to September, 1932, and the Judge took five months to prepare the judgement. It was one of the longest and it attracted attention both inside and outside India. The costliest of Labour trials. Like the Cawnpur case earlier Nationalist Press and Nationalist leaders in India regarded

the arrested persons as nationalists and, therefore, deprecated the wholesale arrests. The Working Committee of the Indian National Congress even passed a resolution to the effect.¹ Mahatma Gandhi held that the arrests were made by a panicky government to strike terror.² Early in April, 1929 a number of leading Indian nationalist leaders agreed to constitute a Civil Defence Committee and to collect funds. Their public appeal was issued over the signatures of Motilal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Srinivas Iyengar, Dr. Ansari, N. C. Kelkar, Dr. Moonze and M. S. Aney. The Defence Committee consisted of Dr. Ansari, Jawaharlal Nehru, C. R. Narain Singh, P. Sharma, Dr. Mohammed Alam, Lala Girdhari Lal, Diwan Chaman Lal, Dr. Kitchlew etc. Outside India the Workers' Welfare League of India, London, took initiative in the constitution of a Meerut Defence Committee and a Defence Fund. Appeals were issued to the workers of Great Britain to condemn the arrests and to contribute for their defence. The issue was also raised in the Parliament. Similarly, defence efforts were made in the Soviet Union. The money for the defence came mostly from outside.

The need for defence brought to the forefront quite a few young, energetic communists like B. T. Ranadive, S. V. Despande, Mrs. Nambiar, R. D. Bharadwaj etc. who visited Meerut a number of times, and held consultations with the prisoners not only over the line of defence but also over party affairs. Born in 1904, Ranadive had secured a first class first M.A. degree in Economics from the Bombay University in 1927. In early years Tilak had been his ideal, but in 1927 he read R. P. Dutt's 'Modern India' and was drawn towards Marxism. Bharadwaj had been born in Meerut in 1908. He took his M.A. degree in 1931. He was an able organiser and a powerful speaker.

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, p. 31. Even men like Jawaharlal Nehru and Kailash Nath Katju were on the Legal Committee which defended the accused.
2. D. G. Tendulkar: *See Mahatma*, Vol. II, pp. 468-69.

In the beginning of 1930, partly due to the inauguration of the Civil Disobedience movement and partly due to disagreement over the line of defence, the Nationalist Meerut Defence Committee was dissolved; but lawyers engaged by it carried the case right to the end. Dr. Katzu and others defended them in the High Court.

Spratt mentions that the life in jail was not bad and that they were given various facilities of recreation. But once the prisoners went on fast against the miserable conditions of jail life.

As in the Cawnpur Conspiracy Case, the accused in this case also based their defence on the ground that they had every right to profess and practise socialism. As regards the charges of conspiracy, they argued that at the time of their arrests both the A.I.T.U.C. and the Communist Party of India were legal bodies and, therefore, there was no need for them to indulge in secret, conspiratorial activities.¹ In regard to the charges of fomenting strikes of industrial workers, they argued that they were caused by economic reasons. In this connection they pointed to the two important Reports of the period. A. A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth, the delegates of the B.T.U.C. to India, in their "Report on Labour Conditions in India", said, "It is undeniable that the Indian workers are half starved and badly clothed, as well as horribly housed. There is no justification whatever for this state of affairs, yet, as far as we can judge, it would appear to be definite policy of the employing class in India to stabilise poverty on a permanent basis. The Indian workers should be encouraged to make the strongest possible stand against such an inhuman policy".² Speaking about the strikes, the Royal Commission on Labour in India (1931), said, "But although workers may have been influenced by persons with nationalist, communist or commercial ends to serve, we believe that

1. See, *Communist Party of Great Britain: The Prisoners' Reply*.
2. A. A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth; *Report on Labour Conditions in India*, p. 11.

there has rarely been a strike of any importance which has not been due, entirely or largely, to economic reasons.”¹

The trial, as it developed, assumed a propagandist character on both sides. The ball was set rolling by the opening speech of Langford James, the Government prosecutor—he died immediately thereafter—who vehemently attacked Communism, national and international, in the choicest phraseology, characterising them as enemies of civilised life.

The accused, particularly the communists among them, had decided to make such statements as would help to publicise the ideology and programme of the Communist Party. Every accused made an individual statement of his own. They also made a joint statement. The latter is of particular interest, because it embodies their views on Marxism-Leninism and its applicability to the Indian scene, the nature of the Indian revolution and the role of the C.P.I. in it, etc. In general, the communists among them defended Marxism, proletarian internationalism and admitted that they were communists and had been members of the C.P.I.

G. M. Adhikari, one of the accused, thus declared in his concluding remarks from the dock: “The nature of the present case is such that the question of defending the individual does not arise. The question is to defend the Party, its ideology, its right to exist, its right to affiliate to and be assisted by the Communist International. If I have to deal with the Communist International at length it is because the prosecution has made it the central figure in this case We as communists feel it our duty to defend it before the Court and the public and place imperialism and capitalism on trial. The Prosecution have hurled the vilest abuse on Communism, Communists and the Communist International. I shall treat their abuse with the contempt it deserves, but

1. *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour*, p. 335.

hurl back the charge of being criminal against human society as a whole, in the teeth of the imperialists and their highly paid agents themselves. Who are the social criminals? I ask the blood-thirsty imperialists who carried fire and swords through entire continents, who have instituted a Colonial regime of blood and terror, who have reduced the toiling millions of these continents to abject poverty, intolerable slavery and are threatening them with mass extinction as a people; or the communists, who are out to mobilise the revolutionary energies of the toiling masses of the whole world and hurl it against the wretched system based on ruthless oppression and brutal exploitation, smash it and create in its place a new one and thus save human society and its civilisation from the catastrophe towards which it is undoubtedly heading? The official representatives of social criminals in this case are sitting on the Prosecution benches."¹

Judgement was announced on 16th January, 1933. Muzaffar Ahmad was sentenced to transportation for life; P. Spratt, S. A. Dange, S. V. Ghatge, K. N. Joglekar, and R. S. Nimbkar received transportation for 12 years; Bradley, Mirajkar and Usmani transportation for 10 years; Joshi, Mazeed, and D. Goswami transportation for 7 years; A. Prasad, Adhikari, Josh, Desai transportation for 5 years; Chakravarty, Basak, Hutchinson, Mitra, Jhabwalla and Sehgal four years' rigorous imprisonment; Huda, Alwe, Kasle, Gauri Shanker, Kadam three years' rigorous imprisonment. K. Ghose, B. N. Mukherjee and S. N. Bannerjee were acquitted. D. R. Thengdi had passed away in September, 1932. Kishorilal Ghose died soon after his release as a result of a disease contracted while in prison. The communists sharply reacted to the heavy sentence. The Executive Council of the A.I.T.U.C. at a meeting held on 16th April, 1933 condemned the heavy sentences. There were also demonstrations and protests elsewhere.

1. *Quoted in the Meerut Conspiracy Case by Percy Glading, pp. 13-14.*

In a judgement delivered on 3rd August, 1933 the Allahabad High Court, on an appeal, drastically cut the duration of the convictions. Muzaffar Ahmad, Dange and Usmani were given 3 years' rigorous imprisonment each; Spratt 2 years' rigorous imprisonment; Ghate, Joglekar, Nimbkar, Bradley, Mirajkar, Josh, Mazeed and Goswami got 1 year's rigorous imprisonment each; Chakravarti for 7 months. The convictions of A. Prasad, Joshi, Basak, Adhikari and Huda were maintained but they were ordered to be released forthwith from jail. The rest were acquitted.¹

The Meerut Conspiracy Case, its launching, its conduct (including the huge cost and the long time involved), and its results continued to evoke controversy. There was even disagreement between the India Office and the Viceroy as to the actual achievements of the case. There was general agreement as to the immediate gains in terms of a crushing blow to the communist activity. It was admitted on both sides that the case removed veteran communists and trade unionists at a very critical juncture in India's history, and that if they had been free in 1930 and succeeding years they would probably have made common cause with the Congress civil disobedience movement. Even a self-analytical note prepared by the Party later admitted that Meerut smashed the crude beginnings of the C.P.I. and wiped away the entire all-India leadership.² But in London there was a considerable feeling that the case and particularly the sentences were not in keeping with 'the traditional British sense of justice'. There was also a general impression that the Meerut prisoners had been convicted in connection with activities devoted to improving the conditions prevailing among the lower orders in India.

As a long term effect the case was a disappointment from the Government point of view in that it helped popularise Communism throughout the country. Muzaffar

1. *Meerut Prisoners Release Committee: Meerut Conspiracy Case*. pp. 20-21.
2. *Courtesy Mohit Sen.*

Ahmad, a convict in the case, proudly mentions that 'the communist ideology came to be established in India from the time of the Meerut Conspiracy Case.¹ Spratt, another convict, declares : "If the prosecution propaganda backfired against the British regime, ours was, we heard, fairly effective. On the whole the revelation of our secret methods caused people to admire us : We had done what most young men wanted to do and but for the Mahatma would have done. We had denounced the Congress leaders, but so had a great many other people—the young leaguers, the terrorists, the independence group of Jawaharlal and Subhas and the Congress left who soon after formed the socialist party. We had our opportunity in the sessions court to make political statements, and these were widely published in the press."²

Attempts to salvage the C.P.I.

Whatever long-range favourable prospects the case might hold out for the communists, it had an immediate paralysing effect on their organization. The entire centralised leadership of the Party having been wiped away, those who were left out had to face the gigantic task of salvaging the Party or what was left of it. A communist party is but a weapon for carrying out a predetermined goal and lack of ideological clarity on matters of policy necessarily finds reflections in the organizational set-up of the party; and this is exactly what happened to the C.P.I. between 1929-33. The eve of the Meerut arrests meeting had failed to chalk out a clear path; the W. & P. P. persisted with a remarkable degree of tenacity, the communists had not as yet fallen fully in line with the Comintern policy, and the organizational tangle of a legal and an illegal communist apparatus remained unresolved. For almost the whole of 1929 the four parties involved, that is, the Meerut prisoners, the communists outside jail, the British communists and the Comintern engaged themselves in in-

1. M. Ahmad : C.P.I., p. 35

2. Spratt : Op. Cit., pp. 51-52.

conclusive confabulations, and though from towards the second half of the year there was a general veering round the Comintern line; yet the recalcitrants in the British Communist Party, the Meerut communist prisoners and the Indian communists outside were reluctant for sometime to give total support, particularly in respect of the W. & P. P., the characterisation of the Imperialist policy and the consequent role of the Indian bourgeoisie. However, from the very beginning, the consensus was in favour of building a long delayed, strong, centralised communist party apparatus which could be the vanguard of the revolutionary forces and exercise hegemony over the national movement, though the local communists did not, for some time, comprehend the full significance of also building an illegal organization. It is an essay in the sociology of Indian Communism that though till 1929 it had not accepted every advice in an unquestioned manner and had even resisted some of them, it had its rigor slowly mellowed down after 1929. Some of the misfortunes of the Party in the momentous years that followed were undoubtedly due to this undiscerning attitude.

Amidst this variegated, confused ideological situation the communists outside held discussions with the Meerut communist prisoners whenever they got an opportunity.¹ In the meanwhile international Communism continued its efforts to project its new line. Most of the British Communists having given their note of dissent at the Sixth World Congress, V. Chattopadhyaya, who had been actively associated with the League against Imperialism, came back upon the scene as a prominent spokesman of the Comintern. He was supported by men like recanting Luhani. They frequently contributed to the Comintern journal. A Manifesto of the Communist International issued towards the end of March, 1929 again referred to

1. Spratt points out that the Communists outside, concerned with the defence of the prisoners, went to Meerut to consult them and set up what amounted to a party office there. (Opt. Cit, p. 53).

the two-class character of the W. & P. P., posited agrarian revolution as the pivot of the revolution in India and called upon the workers of India to fight against the capitalists and imperialists by organising and consolidating their vanguard in the Communist Party which could lead the national revolutionary struggle to victory.¹ Kuusinen, who had sought into prominence at the Sixth Congress, made an important report on 'the growth of the Indian Revolution' to the Tenth Plenum of the E.C.C.I. meeting in Moscow in July, 1929. The Report was published in the I.P.C. of 20th August, 1929.

Kuusinen reemphasized the decisions of the Sixth Congress and further developed its implications. As at the Sixth Congress, he maintained that British Imperialism could not pursue any other policy than that of impeding and retarding the industrialisation of India, and this led to an accentuation of economic crisis. Secondly, going further left than the position he had adopted at the Sixth Congress, he held that the real national liberation movement of India was represented not by the bourgeois National Congress but by the proletarian mass demonstration against this National Congress.² This was a clear and emphatic call for struggle against the Congress and to extricate the masses from the influence of the National Congress and the communists later followed this advice with disastrous consequences. Thirdly, he characterised Roy as an arch-Khivist and declared that he was 'no longer our comrade.'³ Fourthly, he deplored the fact that W. & P.P. still held the scene. And finally, he pinpointed the weak spot of Indian Communism, namely, the absence of a real, functioning C.P.I. "Our greatest weakness there is the fact that we are not yet firmly enough established as a Communist Party."⁴

1. I.P.C., 5th April, 1929, p. 339. This was also the theme of P. Sch whose article on the W. & P. P. appeared in the same issue.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 846.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 847.

4. *Ibid.*

By the end of the year 1929 the communists came to accept the Comintern line as reflected in the deliberations of the annual session of the A.I.T.U.C. in November, 1929, leading to a split in that body.

Efforts to reorganise the Party and resume its campaigns began after this important meeting. Early in 1930 both the Bombay and Calcutta groups became active. Moved by the spirit of communist consolidation, the Calcutta Communists like Abdul Halim, Ranendra Nath Sen, Somnath Lahiri and others constituted 'The Calcutta Committee of the Communist Party of India', started work under its banner and formed communist consolidation rings. The committee later became the rallying point of communist unity. The communists in Bombay, like Ranadive, Despande and Mrs. Nambiar etc. formed the Young Workers' League which became the base of the C.P. in Bombay. They also brought out a weekly organ in English known as the Workers' Weekly under the editorship of S. V. Despande. Styled organ of the militant working class, its first issue appeared on Sunday, the 26th January, 1930.¹ It was through this paper that various issues were projected from a Marxian standpoint, the other papers having ceased publication after Meerut arrests. The issues of the paper from January to April, 1930 posited all the ideas later incorporated in the Draft Platform of Action of the C.P.I.

A perusal of the various issues shows that the local communists had arrived at the following conclusions: Firstly, the Indian national bourgeoisie came to be regarded as counter-revolutionary.² Secondly, the National Congress was regarded as a representative of the national bourgeoisie, and while it was not yet categorically regarded as counter-revolutionary, but there was a tendency to treat it as such and its leaders like Gandhi as compromisers not

1. *Workers' Weekly, Ibid.*

2. *Workers' Weekly, April 2, 1930.*

interested in the fight for independence.¹ Thirdly, the left Congressmen of the Independence League school like Nehru and Bose were regarded as radical appendix to the National Congress, not really interested in socialism. April 24 issue of the paper was rather blunt on the point : "There can be no unity between you (Nehru) and the revolutionary working class movement." Fourthly, in consonance with this line, although the very first issue of the paper welcomed the independence goal of the Congress but it called upon the workers to participate in the Independence Day demonstrations in their separate processions and slogans. Fifthly, the Comintern line on the W. & P. P. came to be accepted. It was acknowledged that the W. & P. P. movement was a reflection of the awakening of the toiling masses and their discontent against and resistance to imperialism. As a United Front of two classes it was an organised attempt to separate from the Congress movement but it was also admitted that the movement reflected the vacillating policy of the Indian petty-bourgeoisie and it was never able to clarify its ideology.² A continued alliance of the workers and peasants was favoured but it was also held that this unity could be achieved only through a revolutionary working class party, that is, the Communist Party. "The alliance of the working class and peasantry in the national struggle is of vital importance but this alliance can be organised only if the working class plays the role of leaders and organisers of this alliance. To be the leaders the working class must have a political party of the proletariat."³ And finally, the need for a revolutionary working class party was emphasized but it was also felt that an illegal C.P. should have priority and the Meerut prisoners were criticised for not having attempted to build such an apparatus.⁴ April 2 issue of the paper contained the following programme of

1. *Ibid*, January 26, 1930.

2. *Ibid*, February 7, 1930.

3. *Ibid*, February 17, 1930.

4. *Ibid*, March 20, 1930.

the working class in the struggle for independence of India which was later included in the Draft Platform of the Party: (1) The objective task of the rapidly approaching revolution in India was abolition of feudal-imperialistic land system and of the British Imperialist control of economy, and radical change in the conditions of working class. (2) This revolution was a national democratic revolution. (3) The leadership of this struggle was to be the working class in alliance with the peasantry and supported by the revolutionary petty-bourgeois elements. (4) The political objective of the national democratic revolution was the establishment of the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. (5) This was to be a stepping stone to the proletarian social revolution and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

These points were also maintained in the joint statement made later by the eighteen communist accused in the Meerut trial. The British Communist Party, too, slowly veered round the Comintern line and while it did not as yet accept the Comintern characterisation of the British Imperial policy in regard to India, but it came to accept the other points in the plank. Thus it observed: "The counter-revolutionary National Congress of the capitalists can't lead the fight of the workers and peasants for Indian independence. Only the Indian working class and its fighting Communist Party can lead the struggle to victory."¹ With regard to the characterisation of the Indian bourgeoisie, the Comintern also came round to the British Communists' viewpoint which is illustrated by the fact that while in August, 1930 Chattopadhyaya was still talking of 'the impending capitulation of the Indian national bourgeoisie',² by October, 1930 he had come to the conclusion that the Indian National Congress was against revolutionary development,³ and that at a time when an

1. C.P.G.B.: *India's fight for separation and independence.*

2. I.P.C.: *28th August, 1930, article by Chattopadhyaya under the same title, p. 9.*

3. I.P.C., *6th November, 1930, article by Chattopadhyaya.*

unprecedented mass nationalist movement was going on in the country under the leadership of the Congress.

The consensus among the parties involved having arrived at, the Draft Platform of Action of the Party was prepared in October-November, 1930, and thus began efforts to re-create the all-India party centre. The C.I. rendered direct aid in this—in the form of an emissary.¹ The Draft was published in the International Press Correspondence of 18th December, 1930. Copies of it were also distributed at the time of the Karachi session of the National Congress.

The New Platform of Action

The new platform of the Party called the 'Platform of Action of the C.P.I.' finally adopted in 1930, was a comprehensive document and was based on the new orientations decided upon by the Sixth World Congress. In the preparation of it even the old leaders had taken some part, for its draft was not only being discussed on the night before the arrests took place, but they also took part in the consultations that took place thereafter. Under the new plan the C.P.I. was for the first time affiliated to the C.I. in 1930, with S. V. Despande as General Secretary. Despande, who died recently, was like many Leftist leaders of this period, a product of the Non-Cooperation era. When that movement was withdrawn in 1922, Despande did not immediately join the communists and it was only in 1927 that he did so. In 1929 he was also elected General Secretary of the A.I.T.U.C.

To revert to the Platform of Action,² it was divided into two parts. Part One dealt with the general principles, and enunciated the main objects of the Party and defined its attitude towards other groups and parties. Part Two contained the general demands and the special demands. Under special demands were formulated such demands for workers, peasants, pariahs and slaves, town and petty-

1. Notes by the C.P.I., Courtesy, Ajoy Ghosh.

2. For full text see, Draft Platform of the C.P. of India, International Press Correspondence, 18th December, 1930.

bourgeoisie, women, soldiers, and youth. The general principles laid down by the Platform declared that the main tasks confronting the Indian Revolution were winning the battle for democracy and the establishment of a Socialist Society and ultimately of complete Communism. Complete independence of the country was the pre-condition for creating necessary material forces for the victory of Socialism, but the revolution should not merely stop at the realisation of the freedom of the country. The task of the revolutionary elements was, therefore, to see that in the very process of struggle for independence firm foundations were laid for the final victory of Socialism. Therefore, even the immediate aim of the revolution should not be a 'bourgeois democratic' revolution but the establishment of a new type of democratic government, that is, "the democratic dictatorship of the working class and peasants' Soviet Government in India". This was a form of state power distinct both from the bourgeois form of government and the proletarian dictatorship. Such an aim could only be realised if an agrarian revolution directed against both imperialism and landlordism were fully established as the basis of the movement which must succeed in drawing in all the toiling masses under the leadership of the proletariat and its party. For this the independent role of the working class and its party was insisted upon. This was all the more necessary because no other party or group in India was willing to undertake these tasks of the Indian revolution.

In consonance with this objective the platform declared that the following policy was to be carried through to complete the revolution which India was undergoing at that time :

(1) The complete independence of India by the violent overthrow of the British rule, the cancellation of all debts, the confiscation and nationalisation of all British factories, banks and railways, sea and river transport and plantation industries.

(2) Establishment of a Soviet Government, the realisation of the right of national minorities to self-determination, including separation. Abolition of Native States. The creation of an Indian Federal Workers' and Peasants' Soviet Republic.

(3) Confiscation without compensation of all lands, forests and other property of the landlords, ruling princes, churches, the British Government, the officials and money-lenders and the handing of these over for use, to the toiling peasantry. Cancellation of slave agreements and all indebtedness of the peasants.

(4) Eight-hour working day and radical improvement of the conditions of labour, increase in wages, and state maintenance of the unemployed.

The immediate demands that were variously directed to the different strata of society had their primary object the developing of a mass revolutionary movement. Economicism was to be abandoned at all costs. The whole tone of the platform as well as nature of the sectional demands left no doubt that the Party had decided to aim at the complete and immediate mobilisation of the people for a mass political struggle and seizure of power by armed insurrection.

The section on special demands for workers called for the establishment, in the immediate future, of complete freedom of trade unions and the right to demonstrate and to strike. The 8-hour working day for adults and 6-hour for youth up to 20 was demanded along with equal pay for equal work for men, women and children; a compulsory weekly rest for full pay and paid holiday of 4 weeks for adult and 6 for youth; state insurance against unemployment, sickness and accidents and old age; state fixation of minimum pay of Rs. 50 and prohibition of deduction from wages for any reason or purpose. It declared that it was definitely against the principle of arbitration by capitalist courts. But what was more important, it demanded that the trade unions must increasingly become functioning mass organisations and that the A.I.T.U.C. must be trans-

formed in a fighting centre of the Labour Movement on a class basis. The policy also was to transform all individual strikes into a general political strike and for this purpose immediate organisation of factory committees was emphasized.

Reformists of all shades were to be expelled and isolated. Left nationalists also were regarded in the same light and were to be forced out of leadership. Similarly, it made a call to the peasantry to organise themselves immediately into 'revolutionary peasant committees' and to engage in all kinds of political demonstrations. They were also to collectively refuse to pay taxes and dues, to refuse to carry out decisions and orders of Government and its agents, to refuse to pay rent, irrigation charges or other exaction, to refuse to pay debts and arrears to Government, the landlords and moneylenders and to refuse to carry out any labour services. Regarding soldiers it called for the spreading of revolutionary propaganda among soldiers and police with a campaign of explanation of the necessity of an armed insurrection in which the soldiers would act with the toiling masses. To carry out this work revolutionary camps would be organised and spread within the ranks of the army. It emphasized that the Indian people were not alone in their fight against imperialism. A new constitution of the Party was also adopted under which the Party was described as a section of the C.I.

The Communists' attitude to the National Congress and Civil Disobedience

By far the most significant development in the communists' policy was the new attitude that they adopted towards the National Congress. Despite severe criticism of its policy and programme the communists so far had, side by side with their independent work, worked inside the National Congress. But there were a number of developments which, according to the communists, led to an estrangement of this relationship. The first, of course, was the Sixth World Congress with its swing to the Left. Secondly, the attitude of indifference of the National Congress towards

the great strike wave (1928-29). Thirdly, the withdrawal by the National Congress in 1930 from the National Defence Committee formed to conduct the defence of the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners. Fourthly, the Congress supported the Nehru constitution. Fifthly, the eleven points of Gandhi formulated in January, 1930 and supported by the Congress, were almost all demands of the Indian bourgeoisie and the landlords. And finally, the Congress emphasized non-violence and urged cessation of class disputes in the name of national struggle. Be that as it may, the decision was taken to leave the Congress, at the opening of a most important period in the history of India and of the National Congress—the period of the Civil Disobedience Movements of 1930-31 and 1932-33.

The Platform described the Congress as an organization of the Indian bourgeoisie which, being linked with landlords, had betrayed struggle for independence and for the radical solution of the agrarian problem. An article, "Next tasks of the Indian Revolution"¹ described Congress as an executive committee of national bourgeoisie. The duty to carry on the struggle for freedom rested with the toiling masses under the leadership of the proletariat. The platform declared forthright, "The greatest threat to the victory of the Indian revolution is the fact that the great masses of our people still harbour illusions about the National Congress and have not realised that it represents a class organization of the Capitalists working against the fundamental interests of the toiling masses of our country." It held that the interests of the Indian Revolution would advance in the same proportion as the influence of the National Congress and its leaders over the masses was undermined. Unmasking of the Congress in the eyes of the working masses was, therefore, one of the items of the programme of the Party.

Sharp criticisms were also made of Gandhism and of the 'Left Group' that was just emerging inside the Con-

1. *International Press Correspondence*, 20th February, 1931.

gress. Of Gandhism it has been said : "The Policy of Gandhism, on which the programme of the Congress is founded, uses a cloak of vague talk about love, meekness, modest and hard working existence, lightening the burden of the peasantry, national unity, the special historic mission of Hindustan, etc. But under this cloak it preaches and defends the interests of the Indian Capitalists, the inevitability and wisdom of the division of society into rich and poor, eternal social inequality and exploitation."

To the communists, now insisting upon mass insurrection, the Gandhian method of non-violence became particularly objectionable and it was singled out for fierce criticism. The Platform declared that the history of revolutions all over the world—and borne out by the lessons of class struggle in India—amply demonstrated that there could be no successful revolution by peaceful means. Nor was it correct, it said, to advise the masses to abjure their right to use force. To avoid distortion of their meaning and to avoid any attempt to associate the policy with one of terrorism, the distinction between the people armed for insurrection and terrorism was made clear and the latter course was condemned in the strongest terms.

Communists and 'Left' Congressmen

The Sixth World Congress had described Social Democracy as the last reserve of the bourgeoisie and its most reliable pillar of support. All left groups and parties other than communists were described as 'social Fascists'. In keeping with this characterisation, the Left Wing inside the National Congress was bitterly criticised. The Platform declared that the 'Left Wing' was even more dangerous because, while mouthing revolutionary phraseology in words, it did not support revolutionary action and tried to restrain all the struggles of the masses. The Independence League of Nehru and Bose was seen to be playing such a role. It was argued that the radical points that had been inserted in the programme of the League did not constitute demands for the realisation of which the masses

must fight, but merely promises which the bourgeoisie gave in order to deceive the masses.¹

The policy towards these Left elements was, therefore, to isolate them from the masses and mass organizations like the trade unions. To quote the Platform, "The most harmful and dangerous obstacle to victory of the Indian revolution is the agitation carried on by the 'Left' elements of the National Congress led by Jawaharlal Nehru, Bose, Ginwala and others."

"The exposure of the 'Left' Congress leaders, who may once again undertake to set up a new Party or Organization like the former League of Independence, in order once again to bamboozle the mass of workers is the primary task of our Party. Ruthless war on the 'Left' national reformists is an essential condition if we are to isolate the latter from the workers and mass of the peasantry and mobilize the latter under the banner of the Communist Party and anti-imperialist agrarian revolution in India."

The Platform did not rule out the policy of a united front with 'Left' Congressmen but it observed that this unity must be with the masses and not with the leaders or their organization. Moreover, unity must be on a definite plan of action directed towards the realization of complete independence.

Communists and Civil Disobedience

Far more important than this theoretical characterisation of the Congress and its 'Left Wing' was the attitude adopted towards the Civil Disobedience Movements. The first movement—that of 1930—was seen to possess possibilities of development into what the communists understood by armed insurrection, and they, accordingly, made efforts to turn it in that direction. The G.I.P. Railway strike (April, 1930), the Sholapur rising (June, 1930), the insurrection in the N.W.F.P. and peasant movements in different parts of the country were regarded as happy

1. I.P.C., 29th March, 1929.

auguries. They gave a call for a general political strike and appealed to Nehru, Bose and other Congress leaders to support this move. With respect to the peasantry, they called for a general no-rent and no-tax campaign. This attempt failed and henceforth they stood aloof from the movement. They characterised it not as a struggle but as a 'manoeuvre' of the Indian bourgeoisie to obtain concessions from imperialism. It was pointed out that Gandhi's whole programme of action was not only limited and relatively harmless but the main items of the programme of civil disobedience, like violation of salt law, boycott of foreign cloth, etc, were such as benefitted the native capitalists, while at the same time, they diverted the attention of workers and peasants from their main struggle against landlords and capitalists.¹

Extremist sections even went to the point of posing it as a struggle of the Congress with the toiling masses of the country. The fundamental feature that they saw in the political situation of this time was the ever growing mass movement. This movement possessed of explosive revolutionary potentialities, forced the Congress to step in, with the sole purpose of restraining the movement. Thus V. Chattopadhyaya wrote in the I.P.C. (Nov. 6, 1930) : "But the real struggle that is going on is not between the Congress and the British Imperialism but between the Congress and Indian Revolutionary Movement." The "Notes of the Month" in the Labour Monthly (May, 1930) observed : "The Indian Congress leaders, headed by Gandhi representing the profoundly dissatisfied Indian bourgeoisie, are not part and parcel of the vast mass agitation now taking place in the country, however much it may appear that they are national leaders and instigators of the present revolt."

Splits in the A.I.T.U.C.

The Meerut Conspiracy Case is a milestone in the communist activity in India. The case not only dealt a

1. R. P. Dutta : *India Today*, p. 341.

severe blow to Communism but it also marked the end of a phase of communist activity in India. The Nagpur session of the A.I.T.U.C., which met in November, 1929 and where a split took place, only marked its ceremonial consummation.

At this session the issue of international affiliation came up again in all its fury. The Congress itself was being presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. The communists, in the meantime, had affiliated the big Bombay Girni Kamgar union to the A.I.T.U.C. and they could count upon a safe majority. They, therefore, came out with a proposal to affiliate to the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat and Communist Despande's motion to the effect was passed by a majority in the Subjects Committee. Thereupon, other delegates, under N. M. Joshi, withdrew from the conference and decided not to take any further part in its proceedings. Despite a reconciliation move, made later on, by which the supporters of the Pan-Pacific withdrew their proposal, the rift having been created could not be healed. There were, in fact, all the differences that arose from the two conceptions of Trade Unionism, and in addition there were differences over specific issues such as boycott of the Whitley Commission on Labour (whose boycott was advocated by the Red Group but not by the Joshi-Giri Group); the sending of delegates to the I.L.O. which was opposed by the Red Group; and affiliation with the League against Imperialism. The efforts to restore unity, in the face of differences so deep as these, failed.¹

In a statement the seceders maintained that they had taken the decision because the proceedings of the Executive Council of the A.I.T.U.C. had revealed beyond doubt that the majority of its members "are determined to commit the Congress to a policy with which we are in complete disagreement".²

1. *Report of the A.I.T.U.C., Nagpur, 1929.*

2. *The Indian Annual Register, 1929, p. 363.*

The Joshi-Giri Group later formed the Indian Trade Union Federation in 1929. It was sympathetic to the British Trade Union Congress and later affiliated to the International Federation of Trade Unions.¹

Above we have described the split that took place in the A.I.T.U.C. in 1929 but the elements that were left in control of that body were by no means homogeneous and a further split took place at its Annual Session at Calcutta in July, 1931. After the first split, the A.I.T.U.C. was under the control of the Left nationalists with strong communist influence in it, Communist S. V. Despande having become its General Secretary. But the ideological differences between these two sections, which had been overshadowed by the interests of the Left nationalism as a whole, came to the fore with the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement by the National Congress in 1930 and the different attitudes that the two sections adopted towards it. While the communists regarded the Congress as a bourgeois organization, the Left nationalists regarded it as a mass national organization and enthusiastically participated in the movement started by it. While the communists insisted upon the independent political role of the working class, the Left nationalists argued that this role belonged only to the National Congress. While the Communists stood in favour of armed insurrection, the Left nationalists were for peaceful struggle. While the communists advocated a general political strike of the workers and a general no-rent and no-tax campaign all over the country, the Left nationalists held that the workers were not prepared for it and that they would not respond to that call. This, for example, was the reply of Nehru to the communists' call to convert the G.I.P. Railway Strike (1930) into a political strike. The communists favoured immediate affiliation of the A.I.T.U.C. to the P.P.T.U.S., but the Left nationalists argued that there was no use clamouring for foreign affiliation at that stage.

1. See, *I.L.O. Report, 1938, p. 129.*

Both the communists and the Left nationalists occupied points of vantage in the T.U.C. The communists were in control of the vital position of the General Secretary and true to the 'Platform of Action' of the Party, they tried to dislodge the Left elements from the leadership. The Left nationalists, on the other hand, relied upon the nationalist sentiments of the workers, and in view of the great wave of nationalist upsurge that was sweeping all over the country, they were all to build up a large measure of support. Generally speaking, the development of the mass movement on nationalist lines was favourable to the extension of their influence, while the non-participation of the communists in it only assisted them in this respect. They were to profit yet more substantially from the situation that the communists found themselves in, with the appearance of the Roy group on the scene,¹ consisting of some former communists and labour leaders. This group started its work with the avowed object of dislodging the communists from the trade unions.

It was in such an atmosphere that the Annual Session of the A.I.T.U.C. took place at Calcutta in 1931. The session was being presided over by the Left nationalist leader, Subhas Chandra Bose. The Congress resolved into a great struggle between the two leading and opposing forces, and in the final result the communists, led by Despande, seceded from the main body of the Congress. They founded as a rival to the A.I.T.U.C. the Red Trade Union Congress, thus coming out from under the broader banner of the A.I.T.U.C. The Red T.U.C. led a precarious existence from the first, and its members, hitherto protected to some extent by the membership of the A.I.T.U.C., were readily singled out by the Government, if and when it should choose to act against them.

1. We shall shortly describe this event.

Birth of the Roy Group and its relation with the Communists

An important development of this period was Roy's expulsion from the C.I. and the subsequent birth of the Roy Group. In the last chapter we saw how Roy's theory of decolonisation came in for sharp criticism at the Sixth World Congress of the C.I. Due to his illness Roy was not personally present at that Congress but since his policy had been bitterly attacked, Roy, from his sick bed in Berlin, addressed clarifications to the C.I. On the whole he defended his position and maintained his thesis that "in the period of capitalist decay the forms and methods of colonial exploitation were bound to change."¹

But the decolonisation theory was not the sole difference between Roy and the C.I. and in spite of a number of clarifications these differences persisted. Notwithstanding these differences, Roy continued to write in the International Press Correspondence on the Indian affairs right upto March, 1929. A careful perusal of these writings clearly indicate the differences in the policy advocated by Roy and that prescribed by the official line. Roy still seemed to maintain that the process of class-differentiation inside the nationalist ranks was a condition for the success of the national revolution.² He categorically asserted: "The process of class differentiation will be quickened, the nationalist movement will be completely freed from the influence of the anti-revolutionary bourgeoisie, and will develop a clear revolutionary way, in proportion as the influence and intervention of the proletariat and its party in the situation will be effective. The struggle for leadership will have to be fought ultimately between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat."³ One would have thought from this analysis that Roy would put the

1. A. K. Hindi: *M. N. Roy*, p. 172.

2. Roy: *The Ways of the Indian Revolution*, in *International Press Correspondence*, 18th January, 1929.

3. *Ibid.*

main emphasis on organising a party of the proletariat but in practice Roy advised the opposite. He thought that the productive processes in India were low and that consequently the process of class differentiation inside the national movement had been 'slow, tedious and painful'.¹ The class in India that could subscribe to the maximum programme of Communism constituted a very small fraction of the population and, therefore, any plan to organise a Communist Party with only a maximum programme of Communism was bound to fail. Under the circumstances, the communists should lay emphasis upon organising a Left Nationalist Party on the basis of a minimum programme of National Revolution. Moreover, such a Party, Roy thought, should not be outside and independent of the National Congress. On the contrary, it should start as a radical Left Wing inside the National Congress on the basis of the minimum social, economic and political demands of the masses. It should lead them through a series of struggles for the realization of these demands. It was only in the course of these struggles that a Left Nationalist Party would arise, capturing the leadership and organization of the Congress, and eventually helping the formation of the Communist Party.

It was this underlying motive which had been behind Roy's plan first of the People's Party and then of the Workers' and Peasants' Party.² But now he was critical even of the W. & P. P. and found that it could not be the prototype of the Left Party he had in view, because he found that in practice it was going too far to the Left and failing to apply the correct tactics in regard to the National Congress and the Left groups inside it.³ He thought that the nucleus of such a Left Party could be provided by the Anti-Imperialist People's League of Nehru. According to him the League represented a hesitating, though as yet a

1. Cf. this with the position that Roy took at II Congress of C.I.

2. See, Chap. II.

3. Roy: *W. & P. P. of India*, in *I.P.C.*, February 1, 1929.

confused tendency on the part of a section of the petty-bourgeoisie towards a revolutionary policy. It was indicative of the slow though steady class differentiation that was going on inside the National Congress. Given proper guidance and leadership it could develop into a powerful Left Nationalist mass movement. He, therefore, criticised the W. & P. P. for taking a hostile attitude towards it.¹ The League, representing the revolt of the petty-bourgeoisie Left radicals against the compromising policy of the Congress Right, ought to have been supported and encouraged in its attempt, howsoever weak and vacillating, to oust the bourgeois leaders from the leadership of the National Congress and for this purpose an offer of United Front should have been made to them.²

Roy continued to write in the I.P.C. in this critical vein right up to the first week of March, 1929. But evidently his policy was in sharp conflict with that of the C.I. which was insisting upon the independent role of the C.P.I. and its organization and development as such. The C.I. agreed with Roy that the immediate task before the Indian Communists, and before all Left nationalists for that matter, was the struggle for independence, but from that point their analysis diverged. The C.I. took the view that the struggle should and could be successfully carried on only under the leadership, or at least the hegemony of the proletariat and the leadership of the proletariat meant the leadership of the C.P.I. Also, according to the C.I. there was to be no dividing line between the national revolution and the social revolution, the one was to be transformed into the other. For these reasons the C.I. insisted upon the independent role of the C.P.I. Stalin wrote in this connection, "the proletariat of such lands as India must be trained to become the leaders in the movement for national emancipation whilst the bourgeoisie and its spokesmen must gradually be dislodged from leadership. The aim,

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

therefore, must be to create a revolutionary anti-imperialist coalition and to ensure that within this coalition the role of the leader shall be played by the proletariat. But the advanced communist elements will need to insist upon the independence of the C.P. in such lands, for the proletariat can't be prepared for its task as leader, nor can the proletariat leadership be realized by any other than the C.P."¹

After his connection with the I.P.C. had been severed, Roy started to contribute in the opposition press in Germany and wrote a series of critical articles, notably, "The W. & P. P.", "The Crisis of the Communist International", etc. He joined the opposition group to the C.I., led by Thalheimer and Brandler of Germany, Lovestone of the U.S.A. This group included all the opposition elements from many countries, excluding only Trotsky and his followers. The opposition communists maintained that they were not against International Communism but, on the contrary, they were its true representatives. Their standpoint was that they were only opposed to its tactical line and that their object was to work for the immediate return of the C.I. to the old Leninist tactical line from which, they claimed, it had deviated. Therefore, they were also opposed to Trotsky's idea of organising a Fourth International. Their organization, they said, was an ad hoc body to be disbanded when the C.I. was restored to the correct policy it had once pursued under the inspiring guidance of Lenin. The opposition communists nurtured this forlorn hope for long. Early in 1934, in an international conference they resolved to address the C.I. on the eve of the Seventh World Congress, asking for permission to attend it so that the differences might be discussed and a reunion took place. In a letter written on April 21, 1934 Roy supported the move.²

1. J. Stalin: *Questions of Leninism*. p. 279.

2. Roy: *Fragments of Prisoner's Diary*, Vol. III, p. 88.

It was in September, 1929 that the Executive Committee of the C.I. expelled Roy from the C.I., though a decision to this effect had been already taken at the meeting of the Tenth Plenum early in July, 1929 where Roy was branded as a renegade.

The reasons for Roy's expulsion were numerous; his authorship of the decolonisation theory, his failure in the Chinese revolution, his handling of the C.P.I. affairs, his exaggerated reports on the Indian scene, neglect of the C.P.I., and his activities in collaboration with the opposition communists. His subscribing to the decolonisation theory alone did not account for this fall, for a number of British and Indian delegates at the Sixth Congress held more or less similar views and Kuusinen was bitterly critical of them, but they were not expelled. In fact, the first serious blow to Roy's career in the Comintern was dealt by the defeat of the revolution in China. Roy got an inkling of it at the time of the Ninth Plenum of the Comintern held in Moscow in February, 1928. Shortly after Roy left Moscow never to return again. Reports of Tagore and Usmani, largely against Roy and his tactics, had also something to do with his fall. Some of the local communists also had, from time to time, expressed their dissatisfaction and resentment at Roy's handling of the situation.¹ A later communist assessment of Roy maintained that Roy's analysis was not Marxist-Leninist but petty-bourgeois, his politics was not proletarian but left-nationalist; he relied upon the radical petty-bourgeois; and he was attempting to build a radical nationalist party, and not a C.P. His attempt to import Marxist literature was amateurish. He never succeeded in forming a really Marxist cadre in India. No serious attempt was made to print Marxist literature in India.²

An article in the I.P.C. held that it was due to Roy's Menshevik policy that the Indian Marxists did not see

1. Muzaffar Ahmad admits that he had made complaints against Roy, M. Ahmad: C.P.I., Years of formation, p. 36.
2. Written in 1941, Courtesy Mohit Sen.

things in their proper perspective. "Roy's Menshevik policy and his treacherous, anti-revolutionary policy played an extremely harmful role. It demoralised the ranks of the working class on the very basic question—on the question of the hegemony of the proletariat and the formation of a C.P."¹ And further, "Roy and his present followers adhered from the very beginning to a policy which led the working class into the national-reformist camp, led to the subordination of the proletariat to the leadership of the bourgeoisie. Roy does not believe that the democratic revolution will grow later into a socialist one, he did not believe that the working class can be leader of the national revolution, he assumed that a period of capitalist development was inevitable."² It was held that as a result of Roy's policy there was complete confusion inside communist ranks in India leading to a refusal to organise C.P.

Speaking at the Sixth Congress Usmani had referred to the negligence of the Communist International in the primary task of the formation of C.P.³ This was, by implication, a criticism of Roy. But even after his expulsion Roy continued to maintain that he belonged to International Communism. He even addressed a lengthy article entitled "My Crime" to the C.I. explaining his viewpoints.⁴ In this he maintained that he disagreed "with all the resolutions of the Sixth Congress, not only with that on the Indian question." These, he observed, represented "a serious deviation from the tactical teachings of Lenin."⁵ On the charges of 'Right-deviationism' and 'Right-opportunism', etc. levelled against him, he took pains to maintain that he had been a 'traditional leftist' and in this connection drew attention to the fact how at the Second Congress of the C.I. he had taken a position left of Lenin.

1. I.P.C., 19th February, 1934: *India, a few facts of History*.

2. *Ibid.*

3. I.P.C., 3rd August, 1928.

4. Quoted in A. K. Hindi: *M. N. Roy*, pp. 177-89.

5. *Ibid.*

On the 'decolonisation' theory itself he admitted that he maintained it as a 'tendency' indicative of the situation in India. But the term 'decolonisation' itself, he said, was first used by Bukharin. He recounted how in 1927, at a time when he had been in China, an Indian Communist had come to Moscow and in his report emphasized the rapid development of modern industries in India, and how on the suggestion of Bukharin a Commission was set up to examine the question. On his return from China he became acquainted with this report and had been charged to draft a resolution on the basis of the preparatory work accomplished by the Commission. He had, in fact, prepared the draft which, he complained, subsequently became the weapon of attack against him. But while admitting his support of the so-called decolonisation theory, he also made it clear that he did not believe in ideas that had been wrongly ascribed to him. He denied being an advocate of the view akin to the decolonisation theory which held that British Imperialism would gradually lead the Indian people to freedom. Decolonisation, he said, affected only the bourgeoisie who constituted a very small fraction of the entire population. Roy also maintained that he did not advocate the policy of a bloc with the bourgeoisie, "What I proposed," he observed, "and still propose is that in the given condition of India the communists must take the initiative in organising a broadest possible United Front of all the oppressed and exploited social elements under the hegemony of the proletariat with a revolutionary democratic programme to conduct the fight simultaneously on two fronts, against foreign imperialists and the native bourgeoisie."¹

Roy later vividly summed up his reactions to the situation: "The resolutions of the Communist International regarding India since 1928 were the height of stupidity. By 1928 there could not be any illusion about the revolutionary role of the nationalist bourgeoisie.

1. *Ibid.*

The fact of their seeking compromise with Imperialism could not be disputed. But a Marxist should discover the cause of that fact. The cause was gradual disappearance of the monopoly of imperialist finance and the consequent 'decolonisation' of India. The benefit of the process all went to Indian capitalism. The Communist International refused to accept this perfectly Marxist view of the changed situation. The Sixth World Congress in 1928 condemned the expounders of the theory of decolonisation as apologists of Imperialism. Blissfully ignoring the fundamental doctrine of Marxism that every economic system decays and develops internal contradictions, the theoreticians of the Communist International regarded imperialism as something immutable and imperishable.

"He (Kuusinen) maintained that the Indian bourgeoisie was brutally suppressed by Imperialism. Yet, the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International passed a long resolution about India in which the Indian people were warned against the nationalist bourgeoisie betraying them, and the Communist Party was directed to develop the Indian Revolution with the slogan of Soviet Republic and dictatorship of the proletariat!

"Acting on that stupid self-contradictory resolution, the infantile Communist Party of India denounced the National Congress as an organ of counter-revolution just when, as a loose mass movement, it might be brought under a progressive democratic leadership."

To revert to the explanations Roy thus concluded his article 'My Crime' : "The crimes attributed to me I have not committed. My offence is that I lay claim to the right of independent thinking and this is not permissible in the present critical period through which the C.I. is passing."¹

But all these explanations were of no avail, in securing his readmission to the C.I. He, therefore, made up his

1. M. N. Roy: *The Communist International*, Pp. 48-49.

mind to come to India and lay the 'solid foundation' for revolution by working on the spot.¹ The Lahore session of the National Congress (1929), with its declaration of complete independence as the goal of the national movement, heartened Roy and induced him to place before Congressmen a concrete programme of national revolution. It included many items repeatedly advocated by Roy. He reached India by the end of 1930, kept in hiding for some time but was subsequently arrested in connection with the Cawnpur Conspiracy Case (1924) and was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment. On appeal it was reduced to six years which term he spent in the Bareilly jail until his release towards the end of 1936.

During those few months of freedom before his arrest, Roy contacted a number of Congressmen, communists, Left-wing trade unionists and youth leaders and propagated his views among them. He was also present at the Karachi session of the Indian National Congress where he met both Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose with whom he held discussions. Roy and Royists claimed to have some hand in influencing the declaration of the social and economic goals of the Congress, though Nehru and others have denied this.

During the period Roy was in jail the banner of Royism was held aloft by his followers who came to be known as the Roy Group. They had the benefit of intermittent advice from Roy in the form of letters and other communications smuggled out of jail. The important members of the Roy Group were : V. P. Karnik, Sundar Kabadi, Tayab Shaikh, S. Shetty, etc.

Roy had hoped that the Indian Communists would side with him but excepting a few labour leaders and a handful of individual communists, the overwhelming majority firmly supported the C.I. line, and started denouncing him as a renegade and counter-revolutionary. Even non-com-

1. M. N. Roy : *Fragments of a Prisoner's Diary, Vol. III Introduction*

munist leftist and progressives gave credence to the C.I. Under the circumstances, Roy's task was extremely difficult.

Indeed, during this period there was a great tug-of-war between the Roy Group and the official communists, and the struggle between the two sections took place both on the organizational and the ideological plane. The Roy Group criticised the Indian Communists for following a 'left-sectarian' policy, for not participating in the Civil Disobedience movement; for not correctly grasping the forces at work; for ignoring the issue of national freedom and for their slogan of proletarian socialism and the Soviets.

Under the new orientation the Roy Group believed that the organization of a Revolutionary Working Class Party was a necessity and for this purpose it appointed a "Committee for organization of a Revolutionary Party of the Working Class". But it laid more emphasis upon the need to organise a Revolutionary Left nationalist group which would operate under the slogan for a constituent assembly and the right of national self-determination. Thus Royist Shetty wrote: "While admitting the necessity of the organization of the party of the proletariat to lead the struggle, the immediate question of organising the anti-imperialist forces has to be faced. The situation has to be tackled with political realism The left-wing radicals should make a determined effort to forge themselves into a party with a scientific programme of national revolution. The formation of Congress left-wing into a well-disciplined and functioning party is the correct approach to the Congress rank and file by the cadre of convinced Marxists."¹ Thus Karnik of the Roy Group wrote: "A Party of the revolutionary radicals voicing the demands of the inarticulate masses must come forth."² The cardinal feature of this new plan was that the masses of the Indian people were not yet

1. *Ibid.*, November 19, 1933.

2. *Mahratta*, October 1, 1933.

politically conscious and that the political issue of national freedom must be made intelligible to them. For this purpose the Left Wing radicals inside the Congress should forge themselves into a well disciplined and functioning party with a scientific programme of national democratic revolution. They should offer the masses a programme of action and lead them in the struggle for partial demands. It was out of this struggle that would grow both the political consciousness of the masses and a mass organization. The Roy Group held that this was the only realistic approach to the situation. There was no use passing high sounding resolutions about general strike and Socialist Republic. "The goal of a Socialist Republic is too distant and abstract for average worker who wants something nearer and more concrete."¹

The C.I., on the contrary, criticised Roy and the Roy Group for pursuing a Menshevik policy at the time when Roy had been in charge.² They had neglected the work of organising the C.P.I. and pinned their faith only in a bourgeois democratic revolution. The Roy leadership had subordinated the proletariat to the leadership of the bourgeoisie. They had failed to support the political strike of the workers and had in practice acted as the enemy of Proletarian Socialism. It criticised the Roy Group for its faith in the Indian National Congress. According to the C.I. not merely leadership, as Roy held but both the leadership and the organization of the Congress was bourgeois. Roy's position would simply send 'illusions' among the masses that it was possible by a 'fight' of the Congress to achieve freedom³ Roy was also criticised for advancing the slogan of a Constituent Assembly. The danger of this lay in the assumption that a C. A. would be convened while the country was under imperialist rule, and further, this policy led to the abandonment of the slogan for

1. *Report of the AITUC, 1931, appeal of the Roy Group.*

2. *I.P.C., 9th February, 1934.*

3. *I.P.C., 29th March, 1929.*

complete independence and its replacement by the more ambiguous slogan for self-determination.

The Roy Group was also criticised for their 'disruptive' work in the working class movement and for splitting the trade unions. They fought against the hegemony of the proletariat and the formation of a C.P. They were charged of coming out against the slogan of a general strike.¹

The Roy Group worked with the idea of organising a revolutionary party of the working class for some time but after the communists organised themselves in November-December, 1933, the Royists gave up the idea, and reverted to the sole idea of a revolutionary left nationalist party inside the National Congress.

Navendu Datta Mazumdar and his Labour Party

Apart from the Independence League of radical Congressmen and the Roy Group as the leftist contenders of the communists, this period marked the emergence of another rival to the C.P.I. in the form of the Labour Party of N. Datta Mazumdar. Whereas the C.P.I. functioned practically as an illegal organization, the Labour Party purported to be an open, legal party of workers, peasants and all sections of the toiling masses on the basis of classes and class struggle and on the principle of the leadership of the working class. The Party claimed itself to be a Marxist one.

The Bengal Party came into being early in 1933 and in line with the other leftists it adopted a thesis of the Party which was printed in the first issue of the Party organ *New Front* on September 1, 1933, with explanatory notes from its editor and leader Mazumdar.² Shortly after the formation of the Bengal Party, similar parties were also formed in the Punjab and U.P., though they very largely remained paper organizations.

1. *I.P.C.*, 9th February, 1934. *A few facts of History.*

2. *New Front*, No. 1, Vol. I, September 1, 1933. *Calcutta.*

As the title of the Party organ *New Front* reveals, the Party professed to be a new front of toilers and declassed intelligentsia against the 'new front of bourgeois constitutionalism'¹ which, the Party claimed, was being erected in the country after the breakdown of the old front and the collapse of the bourgeois National Congress. It urged the masses to close their ranks and build a genuine working class political organization. The Party was bitterly critical of the Congress and held that ever since the non-cooperation, which was a conscious fight between the British capitalists and the Indian bourgeoisie, the movement had been run under the leadership of and in the interests of the upper bourgeoisie of India.² Its avowed aim was (a) 'the emancipation of the Nation' and (b) 'the emancipation of the classes' and for this purpose it aimed at taking up the leadership of national and class struggle and in this vein even talked of wresting leadership from the Congress.

The leadership of the Party was by no means homogeneous. Apart from being the overall leader Mazumdar represented the group which called itself Marxist, and the representative of the non-Marxist section was Dr. Naresh Chandra Sen Gupta. It will be remembered that Gupta had been also associated with the W. & P. P., Bengal, and had been one of its office-bearers, but M. N. Roy had criticised the association of 'the landlord-aristocrat' Gupta with the W. & P. P. The career of Gupta with the Labour Party also was not an easy one. His article entitled 'Our duty towards Labour' published in the Party organ of September 15, 1933 was criticised by other members. In this paper Sen Gupta had advocated employment of a non-Marxist, non-Leninist approach and ruled out revolution as being out of question in India. He maintained he did not know how Indian Labour could wrest power from

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Speech delivered by N. Datta Mazumdar at the U.P. Labour Conference, July, 1933, in New Front, 1st September, 1933.*

capitalists. His views drew sharp comments in an article published in the paper of November 3, 1933 by a 'Marxist'. The controversy between the schematic 'Marxists' and others inside the Party was carried well into 1934 and Gupta was later pushed out of leadership.

The Party later tried to distinguish itself from the Roy Group and the C.S.P., both of which, according to it, denied the leadership of militant working class.

The Party, however, drew adverse remarks from the C.P.I. which charged it of propagating an economic anti-Leninist trend among the workers. They carried forward the old arguments advanced by M. N. Roy against the necessity of a Labour Party on the British model in the Indian conditions, and charged the Labour Party of economism and reformism.¹ The special point of alarm for the communists was that the Labour Party claimed itself to be a communist group and spread a lot of confusion. In 1933-35 the communists carried a ceaseless struggle against it.

Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutt

We have seen in Chapter Two how Dutt was one of the Indians in exile who had travelled from Berlin to Moscow in 1921, and how after his return from Moscow as a disappointed man Dutt and his friends established a committee for national freedom in Berlin. He continued to work in this way for sometime, and then returned back to India. He travelled in different parts of the country to establish contacts and set up a new political organization but could not succeed in his endeavour. He was requested by friends to join the W. & P. P. but he refused. But he associated himself with the A.I.T.U.C. and with the youth movement. He called himself an international Marxist, but did not ally himself with the communists in the

1. C.P.I. notes, Courtesy Ajoy Ghosh.

country. But Dr. Dutt performed a distinctive role in influencing quite a number of young people—terrorists and others—in Bengal towards Marxism-Leninism by his eulogy of the achievements of the Soviet Union and by popularising the basic teachings of Marx, as well as by his fierce criticism of the ‘compromising’ leadership of the National Congress and the ‘stupidity’ of the terrorist ideas. Bhowani Sen, a prominent communist, who was then a terrorist but gravitated towards Marxism under the influence of Dutt, recalls that many of them ultimately left the terrorist groups and joined the Communist Party under the political-ideological education received from Dr. Dutt, though he himself remained out of it.¹

Communists split

We have seen how efforts to recreate an all-India party centre on the part of the communists began in November, 1930 with the publication of the Platform of Action and how the C.I. had rendered direct aid in this. While the provincial party centres in the Punjab, U.P. and Madras remained in a state of complete disarray, the centres in Calcutta and Bombay started making efforts in this direction but little success was achieved. Both these groups formed provisional party centres and attempted to establish contacts with each other with a view to form an all-India centre but did not succeed in the efforts. The Bombay group, however, succeeded in bringing out “Workers’ Weekly” and in reviving the paper *Kranti*. It also produced some Marxist publications in Marathi. Writing later the Calcutta group blamed the Bombay group for not responding to its repeated letters in this direction,² while the Bombay group also had a similar grievance against the

1. Bhowani Sen: *Some of my past experiences, in New Age, April, 1958.*
2. M. Ahmad writes: “In spite of repeated requests from the Calcutta Committee to give an all-India shape to the Communist Party, there was no response from the Party leaders in Bombay.” (*Opt. Cit., pp. 37-38.*)

Calcutta group.¹ Whoever was to be blamed the fact is that efforts to establish contacts with the provinces did not yield any tangible result. The main reason was that while the Calcutta group was able to maintain unity, the Bombay group had differences which came to the forefront in the middle of 1931 with the result that the attempt to rebuild suffered a slip at the time and led to a split in the group early in 1932.

The two rival factions in the Bombay group were led by the moderate Despande and the extremist Ranadive. The differences related to a number of problems like the attitude to the Congress and particularly the Civil Disobedience started by it, the nature of the work in the trade unions, the nature of the party centre to be established etc. While the one section applied the new line enthusiastically though somewhat mechanically, the other group was uneasy at the fact that due to their non-participation in the Civil Disobedience campaigns the communists were being isolated in the eyes of the masses. These elements pointed out that communists must go in advance of all in mobilising people and fighting government repression, but this did not mean that they had to tone down their criticism of the Congress or to withdraw the slogans like that of a general political strike. In the second half of 1931 these differences were liquidated in Bombay but in the absence of a strong party centre they broke out again and resulted in the split (1932).

The majority of leadership consisting of some working class elements and intellectuals seceded from the Party, leaving the rank and file and a minority of leadership. A general political discussion took place in the open press between the rival groups and the fight was taken to the trade union field. The extremist group had better trade union contacts. They organised the G.K.U. as the Red Flag G.K.U., and also spread out to other places like Sholapur.

1. Party notes, Courtesy, Mohit Sen.

The group which was loyal to the Party got isolated in the trade union field and began to disintegrate.

The year 1932, thus, opened with bleak and gloomy prospects for the communists. "Chaos and disorganization in the Party all over the country appeared in an acute form". Bemoaned orthodox, Communist Muzaffar Ahmad.¹ There was no centre, not even nominal. There were communist groups in Bombay, Calcutta, Ahmedabad and Cawnpore and a beginning was being made by Amir Haidar Khan, who had newly returned from Moscow, at Madras where activity had been intercepted after Chettiar's early attempts. But this was all. Isolated from the mass of the nationalist movement, disjointed organizationally, the communists evoked concern from the Meerut prisoners as well as from the C.I. The Calcutta communists sent a number of reports to the C.I. The Meerut communist prisoners similarly addressed the C.I. showing alarm and concern at the situation. Early in 1932, Spratt, Bradley and Muzaffar Ahmad sent a lengthy report on the situation to the C.I. urging intervention. At this stage the C.I. suspended the affiliation of the C.P.I.

Concern of the C.I. at the new turn in tactics

The attitude adopted by the communists towards Civil Disobedience Movements thus led not only to their isolation from the nationalist masses, but even to the retardation of the growth of the C.P. itself. The C.I. viewed the situation with a considerable degree of alarm. It had fully approved of the new 'Platform of Action' of the Party but it did not approve of the new tactical line adopted by the Party, either towards the Civil Disobedience or towards the All India Trade Union Congress. The Sixth Congress had warned against haste and impatience in the task of isolating the national reformist bourgeois leadership. The International agreed with the Indian Communists that the movement was not a real struggle and that the Congress was a bourgeois organization. Indeed in 1930, the League against Imperialism had expelled Nehru

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 37.

and the National Congress from its fold on the ground that they were compromisers. But according to the C.I., there was no reason why the communists should not have participated even in this limited struggle. The singular cause of alarm for the C.I. was that there did not exist a strong central organization in the form of a well-knit C.P.I., but only factional groups. Thus an article, "A few Facts of Indian History" that appeared in I.P.C. (9th February, 1934) said: "We are compelled to say that the development of the C.P. lags behind the spontaneous development of the Proletariat Movement and the growth of the working class consciousness." As already noted, a grave view of the situation was also taken by the older leaders still in jail who sent their views in form of a memorandum.

The C.I. having reviewed the whole development with considerable alarm, critical essays began to appear in the journal of the Comintern. In May, 1932 the Communist Parties of Great Britain, China and Germany jointly issued an open letter to the C.P.I. pointing out the tactical mistakes.¹ A similar open letter appeared a year later on July 16, 1933 on behalf of the Communist Party of China. In fact at this stage the Comintern started retrieving some of the steps taken at the Sixth Congress and later. In view of the impending danger of fascism it addressed an open appeal to the Second International and to Social Democrats in April, 1933 for working class unity. The thirteenth plenum of the C.I. meeting towards the end of 1933 emphasized the need for a political centre, a central organ and of united front of the working class against the capitalist offensive.

The common error which all these articles and letters stressed as the cardinal error in the work of the Indian Communists was the failure to work inside the mass movements, over which the Indian bourgeoisie had an influence. They pointed out that the task of unmasking the bourgeoisie did not preclude but necessitated active participation in all movements started by the bourgeoisie, for only then it would

1. For full text, see, I.P.C., November, 1932.

be easy to show their 'betrayal' to the people. Similarly, the struggle against 'reformism' in the trade unions did not necessarily mean splitting of the mass organizations or the communists' abstention from work in the trade unions led by 'reformists'. "The task of taking the initiative in the building of trade unions does not contradict, but on the contrary, simultaneously presupposes active work in mass reformist trade unions. A sectarian policy of withdrawal from the trade unions led to the strengthening of the position of the bourgeoisie and their agents."¹

They criticised in strong terms the method of work of the Communist Party of India and urged the formation of an all-India Party on the basis of the Draft Platform of Action. They emphasized the establishment of party spirit and discipline in a true Bolshevik manner. The open letter from the C.C. of the C.P. of China, which was more bitter in tone than others, regretted the fact that though the Indian Communists started from almost the same date as the Chinese Communists but they had not been able to build a strong C.P. whereas in China they had a strong C.P. To add to the gravity of the situation there were factions and groupings inside Indian Communists. "We are becoming more and more uneasy at the slowness of the process of the formation of C. P. of India."² According to them the hegemony of the proletariat was to be exercised not in words but in action and through participation in all movements started even by the reformist bourgeoisie. It was maintained that the communists taking part in these movements must advance their own slogans, carry on communist agitation, showing an example to the backward workers and attracting them to their side.

Another weakness of the Indian communists was that they showed an inability to change from legal to 'underground' forms of struggle and organization.

1. V. Basak, *the present situation in India*, in I.P.C., 22nd Sept., 1933.
2. *Open Letter from C. C. of C. P. of China*, I.P.C., 24th Nov., 1933,

The 'primitive' method of organization of the pre-Meerut days was also criticised. It was pointed out that in those days the communists functioned merely as left-wing trade unionists. But there were weaknesses even in the trade union field in that the trade unions were not organised as revolutionary unions. Instead they were organised on the pattern of leaders and masses so that with the disappearance of leaders the movement was paralysed.

An article entitled "Ways of Establishing a Communist Party" that appeared in the I.P.C. (19th May, 1933) pointed out certain principles that should be followed in the work of establishing a strong C.P. and it also indicated what mistakes were being made by the communists. Firstly, it laid down the condition that advanced workers must actively participate in the struggle for independence and in all democratic movements. It was only by placing themselves at the head of these movements and thereby showing by their agitation, slogans and their self-sacrificing and determined struggle, that they could ultimately win the confidence of the people and fulfil their role as the vanguard of the independence movement. The second condition was that the communists must participate energetically in the new daily struggle of the working class and win their confidence. Thirdly, they must take part in the struggle of the peasant masses. Another article¹ observed that the best way of doing that was to build both a legal and an illegal C.P. To build only an illegal C.P. was left-sectarianism and to build only a legal one was mere reformism.

The result of this criticism and self-criticism was that there developed a restless search for a new path and the communists showed signs of reorientation and re-organization from 1933. The end of the year was also marked by the release of most of the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners. A favourable atmosphere thus developed in favour of restoration of unity in Bombay and towards rebuilding a new centre. The released communists again started trying

1. V. Basak, *Ibid.*

to pull the Party out of the quagmire. In November, 1933 a new draft political thesis was prepared. A secret conference of the Party was held in Calcutta in December, 1933. It was attended by delegates from Bombay, U.P., Punjab and Bengal. It adopted a new political resolution and a new constitution, and elected a new central committee, with Dr. Adhikari as General Secretary. Bradley carried the new thesis to Europe for submission to the C.I. The C.P.I. once again became a section of the International.

Early in 1934 the first issue of the Party's central organ, which contained the new thesis, appeared. The communists now came forward with slogans of unity in the trade union field. At this stage the Royists also joined hands with them in the trade unions. There was urge for unity also on the part of the A.I.T.U.C. Communist rank also swelled due to the fact that, while in jail, communists had been successful in converting many former terrorists and revolutionaries to Marxism. The deteriorating economic situation led to recrudescence of militant trade unionism and strike struggles over wage-cuts. The number of strikes increased markedly in 1933-34. In April, 1934 the communists gave a call for a general strike of textile workers. But these activities notwithstanding, all was not well with the C.P.I. The party centre established towards the end of 1933 again drifted into old ways of working and old ways of organization. Lacking political perspective, it could not provide the centralised, unified leadership. A communist assessment later held that this centre was shaped in trade unionism and economicism and, therefore, it could not see that its job was not to get mixed up with local struggles but to extend unity to communist groups, and to maintain continuity of leadership. The Government again came with strict measures. In April, 1934 on the day of the General Strike, it arrested prominent leaders of the Communist Party. These arrests and repressions that followed once again paralysed the all-India centre and delayed the work of building the Party till early in 1936.

Although it was practically illegal but the Government of India had never formally declared

the C.P.I. illegal. One of the purposes of launching the Meerut Conspiracy Case was to ascertain legal opinion on communist activity. The Allahabad High Court in its appellate judgement in the case had considered the C.P.I. an illegal organization. On 23rd July, 1934 the Government of India declared the C.P.I. with all its Committees and Sub-Committees as unlawful.¹ With this ended a phase of communist activity in India.

CONCLUSION :

During 1930-34 the communists adopted a new Platform of Action based on the decisions of the Sixth World Congress of the C.I. They adopted a new tactical line towards the National Congress, the Congress 'Left', the A.I.T.U.C. and more particularly towards the Civil Disobedience Movements. This led to their isolation from the national movement. The appearance of the Roy Group on the scene further undermined their position as a Left Wing movement, and finally the Party was declared unlawful. It could be revived as a party only in 1936.

1. *India in 1933-34*, p. 31.

CHAPTER FIVE

Transition to Congress Socialism (1927-1933)

The period from 1929 to 1933 proved to be the most difficult in the experiences of the Communist Party of India. They were under severe disadvantages during these years : the one, as a result of the Meerut Conspiracy Case they were deprived of nearly all their outstanding leaders, and the other was their self-imposed 'left sectarianism' which led to serious tactical errors in relation to their work both in the trade unions and in the independence movement. The W. & P. P., which might lead to the masses and provide an appropriate form of mass action, was being slowly disbanded by them. Moreover, it tended more and more to be independent of the National Congress. At the same time the socialistic influence, which came to India from the British Labour movement, had spent its force and was decidedly on the decline. Something new, however, was appearing on the scene as a third force with the emergence of an indigenous socialist group from inside the Indian National Congress and committed to the twin goals of independence and socialism. This arose from the Congress Left Wing which was gradually orientating itself towards socialistic ideas and aims, and eventually gave rise to the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 as a Left Wing party inside the National Congress. It also manifested itself in the youth and peasant movements, most of which now started talking in terms of socialism, masses, mass action and revolution. Indeed, it was becoming a fashion to style oneself as socialist, radical and revolutionary, and the groups and individuals could not remain unaffected.

The forces comprising this Left Wing were many and heterogeneous and not infrequently they differed on aims and the methods to realise them, but the cumulative effect of their ideas, works and organisations was to create an atmosphere and to generate tendencies, ideological as

well as organizational, which might be styled as "Transition to Congress Socialism." Organisationally they owed primary allegiance to the National Congress and to the goal of national independence, but they also felt attracted towards socialism.

The starting point of these forces was dissatisfaction and disappointment with some aspects or other of the programme of the Indian National Congress and in point of time, as we have already pointed out,¹ they started to come to the surface after the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement early in 1922. Their point of departure was that the movement should not have been withdrawn simply because an infuriated band of peasants in a far-off village had committed an act of violence. This does not mean that they were advocates of violence. In fact, apart from some youth organizations which stood for violence, most of them were believers in non-violence. There might have been an undercurrent of sympathy with methods of armed struggle, but violence was explicitly ruled out because it was an impossible path to pursue under the circumstances then existing in India. But though most of them believed in non-violence as an ethical individual virtue they were not prepared to keep their political behaviour on the same unqualified 'ethical' plane as Mahatma Gandhi: to them, in politics, non-violence was rather to be a policy than a creed as with Gandhi; though no doubt they would have welcomed a spiritual endorsement to their political outlook if it had been possible to construct one.² But practical expediency led them to support non-violence.

They opposed Gandhi's withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation movement because they regarded it as being predominantly peaceful and non-violent. Stray incidents of violence were no justification for withdrawal. Their attitude has been ably summed up by Nehru in his *Autobiography* :³

1. Chapter III. beginning.
2. *J. Nehru : Autobiography*, p. 72.
3. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 82.

“..... were a remote village and a mob of excited peasants in an out of the way place going to put an end, for some time at least, to our national struggle for freedom? If this was the inevitable consequence of a sporadic act of violence, then surely there was something lacking in the philosophy and technique of a non-violent struggle. For it seemed to us to be impossible to guarantee against the occurrence of some such untoward incident. Must we train the three hundred and odd millions of India in theory and practice of non-violent action before we could go forward? If that was the sole condition of its function then the non-violent method of resistance would always fail.” It was this process of heart-searching which, among others, led to the emergence of the Left Wing.

Their other point of departure was a difference over the vague concept of Swaraj, which they criticised as something that in practice imparted weakness to the movement. The Nagpur Constitution of the Congress had declared that the goal of the Congress was attainment of Swaraj¹ but this concept was never clearly defined by the Congress. Thus in his Autobiography Nehru says : ‘What were our principles and objectives in 1921 and 1922? A vague Swaraj with no clear ideology behind it.’² Speaking about it P. Sitaramayya, the writer of the official history of the Indian National Congress says :

“What was it? What would it be? Gandhi himself never defined it, never elaborated it, never visualized it even to himself. It must unfold itself to a discerning vision, to a pure heart from step to step, much as the pathway in a dense forest would reveal itself to the wayfarer’s feet.”³

The Left Wing most emphatically believed that the Congress should set itself the aim of complete independ-

1. N. V. Rajkumar : *Development of Congress Constitution*, p. 26.
2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 86.
3. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 276.

ence, with no equivocation on this fundamental matter of policy; they even commenced an agitation to bring this about.

In the field of economic policy also they maintained that the Congress suffered from a lack of definite policy, although it talked vaguely of the masses. The Congress prided itself on being a nationalist organization and on that score refused to define economic contents of Swaraj. P. Sitaramayya writes :

“The Congress then is a national organization that knows no difference between the classes and the masses, between towns and villages, between rich and poor.”¹

and further

“It represents no particular community, no particular class, no particular interest. It claims to represent all Indian interests and all classes.”²

The Left Wing criticised this generalised approach. They wanted the Congress to define its goal socially and economically and declare itself unequivocally to stand up to the economic grievances of the masses. In early years, however, the Left Wing elements were not clear as to what this programme to alleviate the grievances of the masses was to be except that it must be broadly based on the interests and the welfare of the masses. Initially they became champions of the masses only with the interests of the nationalist movement at heart. Indeed nationalism remained the most abiding passion for them, but they appreciated that the support of the masses was necessary for the strengthening of the nationalist movement itself. If they never succeeded in evolving a socialist ideology and programme, this was because their primary allegiance was to nationalism and to the cause of national freedom and the concomitant ideology of socialism had had to assume a shifting, not so categorically defined character in consonance with the interests and tones of nationalism. More-

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 30.

2. *Ibid.*

over, the immediate goal was to win the battle for freedom, and the question of establishing socialism would arise only in free India.

From 1927, however, the ideas of these Left Wingers on all these issues started taking a more concrete as well as a more organised shape, and it was in the direction of complete independence and socialism that they moved. Jawaharlal Nehru became the intellectual leader of the group, and it is in his writings and addresses of this period that we find expressed the main tendencies of this group. Other important leaders at this time were Subhas Chandra Bose, who had already become hero of Bengali youth, K. F. Narimann, S. Kitchlew, M. Alam, Satyamurti and Srinivas Iyenger. While in his student days in England Nehru had come in contact with Fabian socialism and had been attracted by their views but without being converted. In his Autobiography he speaks of the 'vague Socialist ideas of my college days,'¹ and speaking of his position in 1920 he says : "I was totally ignorant of labour conditions in factories or fields and my political outlook was entirely bourgeois."² He was first drawn towards the peasantry in 1920 in connection with the Peasant Movement in Partapgarh district (U.P.) and from this occasion dates his appearance as a champion of the peasantry.

Nehru went to Europe in March, 1926 and while on this protracted visit to Europe in 1926-27 he undoubtedly came under the influence of socialism. It was during this sojourn abroad that he visited the Soviet Union in November, 1927, along with his father, and he appears to have been considerably impressed by the social experiments that were then being entered into. On his return he loudly applauded the achievements of the Soviet Union. It was also here that he met M. N. Roy for the first time. He also attended the Brussels Congress of League against Imperialism as a representative of the National Congress. Here he came in contact with V. Chattopadhyaya.

1. *Ibid*, p. 35.

2. *Ibid*, p. 49.

Speaking of the change that had come upon him Nehru says : "My outlook was wider and nationalism by itself seemed to me definitely a narrow and insufficient creed. Political freedom, independence, were no doubt essential, but they were steps only in the right direction; without social freedom and a socialistic structure of the society and state, neither the country nor the individual can develop much."¹ Thus the net result of this foreign visit was that nationalism and socialism began inextricably linked up in his mind, though this socialism was not of any established socialist school pattern but of an empirical collectivist variety.

On his return from Europe in December, 1927, he set about the task of giving new orientations to the policy of the Congress. Outside the Marxists of the Communist Party it was he who did most to popularise socialism in the country and it was largely due to his efforts that a definite Left Wing arose inside the Congress whose main purpose was to compel the Congress to define its political, social and economic objectives.

Subhas Chandra Bose was not only an important leader of the group but also a rival of Jawaharlal Nehru. Cambridge educated, he had received baptism in political action under the Swarajist leader C. R. Das, but was later drawn to radical politics and became prominent as a leader of youth and students' organizations. He also became active in trade union politics. Like Nehru, he was in favour of drawing Congress more towards the masses, and favoured a more active participation by the Congress in the national struggle.

As already mentioned, the Left Wing made its first organised effort at the Madras session of the Congress in 1927, when they successfully moved a resolution, pledging the Congress to a policy of complete independence. In October-November, 1928, Nehru, along with Subhas Chandra Bose and S. Iyenger, founded the "Independence of India League", whose object was :

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 166.

- (1) The achievement of complete independence for India, and
- (2) The reconstruction of Indian society on the basis of social and economic equality.

The League was more or less a pressure group within Congress and when the Congress accepted the goal of national independence at its Lahore session, then early in 1930 the League was dissolved. But even when the League was in existence, its activities were mostly confined to the activity of its leaders.

Far more important than these steps forward in clarifying the political aims of the movement, were the attempts at the introduction of economic issues by the group into the programme for national freedom. Stimulated by the influence of socialist ideas they thought the creed of nationalism to be inadequate. Congress, if it wanted its movement to be successful, should, in their view, put forward a socio-economic programme that would appeal to the masses of the country so that the Congress might enlist the support of the masses more effectively. Speaking at the U.P. Political Conference (1928) Nehru said :

“We can no longer make any progress by the cry of Swaraj only. We must make it clear that we aim at economic and social Swaraj as well as political and for this purpose we must lay down a definite economic and social programme.”¹

Under his influence, the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee passed a resolution in April, 1928 to be recommended to the A.I.C.C. for consideration and adoption which read thus :

“In the opinion of this Committee, the great poverty and misery of the Indian people, are due not only to the foreign exploitation but also to the economic structure of society, which the alien rulers support so that their exploitation may continue. In order, therefore, to remove this poverty and misery and

1. *Nehru: Before and After Independence*, p. 127.

to ameliorate the condition of the Indian masses, it is essential to make revolutionary changes in the present social and economic structure of society and to remove the gross inequalities.”¹

The A.I.C.C. adopted this resolution in 1929. This was a great step to be forced upon the Congress, because many of its leaders had hitherto been of the opinion that the poverty of the Indian people was primarily due to foreign rule. In the adoption of this resolution, no doubt, the deteriorating political situation and the impending Civil Disobedience also weighed with the A.I.C.C.

Though the Congress left appeared like crumbling at the Calcutta Congress (1928) yet Nehru's nomination for Presidentship of the Lahore Congress held in 1929, was a reflection of the growing importance of the Left group inside the Congress. It was also an effort designed at keeping the radical left-minded youth within the ambits of Congress discipline and organization. Proposing Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi said :

“I know that I am not keeping pace with the march of events. There is a hiatus between the rising generation and me.”²

In proposing a young leftist the Mahatma was well aware of the differences between Nehru on the one hand and himself and the Congress on the other. The writings and utterances of Nehru on socialism, Marxism etc. since his return from Europe had sent a shiver of disquietude among the rightist leaders of the Congress. Sharp exchanges and discussions followed between Nehru and Gandhi, and some even feared that there might be a break. At one stage even the Mahatma felt that the differences between them was so vast and radical that there seemed to be no meeting ground.³ On occasions Nehru too felt exacerbated at the Mahatma's religious, metaphysical outlook and felt deep anguish due to the strained relation-

1. *J. Nehru: Recent Essays and Writings*, p. 33.
2. *Indian Annual Register*, Vol. II, 1929, p. 14.
3. *Tendulkar, Op. Cit.*, Vol. 8, pp. 350-51.

ship. In his Autobiography Nehru thus opened his mind : "With all his keen intellect and passion for bettering the downtrodden and oppressed, why does he support a system which is obviously decaying, which creates this misery and waste. ?"¹

But despite these differences there was a realization on the part of both that neither could do without the other and that, as the Mahatma admitted, there was a heart union between them which no intellectual differences could break.

The Mahatma maintained : "A lover of discipline he (Jawaharlal) has shown himself to be capable of rigidly submitting to it even where it has seemed irksome. He is undoubtedly an extremist thinking far ahead of his surroundings. But he is humble and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point."²

In the year 1929 Nehru also presided over the annual session of the A.I.T.U.C. held at Nagpur, and thus strengthened his association with the working class.

The Lahore Session of the Congress was important in two respects. For the first time the Congress declared its support for the creed to be Purna Swaraj (complete independence). Nehru's Presidential Address was nothing less than a plea for establishing socialism in India, and this was the first session at which the official platform of the Congress had been used to enunciate such views. Nehru frankly declared, "I must confess that I am a Socialist and a Republican and am no believer in kings and princes or in the order which produces modern kings of industries." He went further : "Socialism is thus for me not only an economic doctrine which I favour, it is a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart."³

But though Nehru and other left-minded Congressmen were quite vocal in their advocacy of socialism but they were quite aware that the question of establishment of

1. *Nehru, Op. Cit.*, p. 528.

2. *Tendulkar : The Mahatma, Vol. II, pp. 489-90.*

3. *J. Nehru : India and the World, p. 27.*

socialism would arise only in free India. They were also aware that it might not be possible for a body like the Congress under the then existing circumstances to adopt a full socialist programme.¹ But they were of the view that the talk of socialism helped clear the path of national struggle itself. Thus Nehru observed : "Why this talk of socialism ? The socialist outlook helps in the political struggle. It clears the issues before us and make us realize what the real political content (apart from social content) of freedom must be."² They were also possessed of the idea that socialism was a world current and India could not keep herself aloof from it.

The activities of the Congress Left were seen markedly at the Karachi Congress held in 1931. This Congress was being held immediately after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (March, 1931) to which the Left was opposed. The feeling among the Left and other youth sections of the Congress ran high also because of the execution of three youth leaders of immortal fame, Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukhdeo, whose reprieve Gandhi was unable to obtain when he had met the Viceroy. This found expression in slogans against Mahatma Gandhi as soon as he reached Karachi station. Partly because the Congress wanted to clarify its stand on the eve of its confrontation with the Government and partly as a concession to the Left the Karachi Congress passed now famous Resolution on 'Fundamental Rights and Economic Policy', by which, for the first time in its history, the Congress tried to define the social and economic contents of Swaraj as it conceived. The preamble of the section dealing with Fundamental Rights categorically stated : "In order to end the exploitation of the masses political freedom must include real economic freedom."³

The Congress affirmed that the policy of Swaraj Government would be to provide for such accepted democratic

1. *Nehru : India and the World*, p. 27.

2. *Nehru : Eighteen months in India*, p. 36.

3. *Indian Annual Register*, 1931, Vol. I, p. 363.

rights as the freedom of association and combination, freedom of speech, press and freedom of conscience, profession and religion, protection of culture, language and scripts of minorities, adult suffrage, free primary education, etc. The Congress then went on to state that the duty of a Swaraj Government would be to provide for a living wage for industrial workers, limited hours of labour, healthy conditions of work, protection against economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment. It recognised the right of Labour to form unions to protect their interests with suitable machinery for settlement of disputes by arbitration. For the peasants it advocated the necessity of substantial reduction in agricultural rent or revenue, and exemption from rent on uneconomic holdings, etc.

These economic objectives were new and important additions to the policy of the Congress and Nehru and his group generally felt elated over it, but they also realized that the achievement of national independence remained primary objective since the question of achieving socialism would arise only in free India. But they emphasized that the adoption of a socialist policy not only served to bring the Indian movement into line with the world movement for socialism but it also strengthened the national movement. This ideology, he maintained, had 'permeated the entire structure of society the world over, and that India would have to go that way.'¹

The importance of Nehru thus lay in the success with which he introduced radical ideas to India, where they exerted a profound influence not only in the immediate political field, but throughout society, encouraging the growth of a modern secular outlook. Indeed a signal contribution of Nehru and the group was their emphasis on a rationalist, secularist, scientific outlook as component elements of Indian nationalism. They felt that Indian nationalism, as so far practised, was anchored in a religious, metaphysical and revivalist outlook which did tremendous

1. J. Nehru: *India and the World*, p. 27.

damage to the movement. It was for this reason that they were critical of Gandhism some of whose concepts, they felt, did not fit in with the spirit of science.¹ It was for this reason that Nehru valued Marxism, for amidst the traditional, religious ways of looking at things, its freedom from dogma and its scientific method of studying concrete social problems were useful.

But though Nehru thus talked widely of Marxism, socialism and the achievements of the Soviet Union, he neither wholeheartedly admired the Soviet experiments, nor did he subscribe to Marxism fully. As a humanist and empiricist with deep roots as much in the 19th century humanist, liberal tradition as in the India's past which led him to call himself a queer mixture of the East and the West, Nehru could never be a conformist. Initially Marxism and the Soviet experiments had attracted him on nationalistic grounds of their antipathy to imperialism and colonialism. About the Soviet Union he said : "I believe in the basic economic theory which underlies the social structure of Russia. But, nevertheless, I don't approve of everything that has taken place in Russia and I don't, therefore, propose to follow blindfolded the example of Russia."² The things that he disliked in the Soviet Union were 'the ruthless suppression of all contrary opinion, the wholesale regimentation, the unnecessary violence (as I thought) in carrying out various policies.'³ In respect of Marxism also he did not appreciate its dialectics and its emphasis on violence; nevertheless, the communist philosophy of life gave him comfort and hope.⁴

Though he, thus, swore by the general principles of socialism, but he did not subscribe to any rigid ideology or any particular 'ism'. He kept up this attitude all along his life. He did not subscribe to everything taught by Marx or admired everything that happened in Russia. He was

1. *Nehru : Unity of India*, p. 121.

2. *Nehru : Eighteen months in India*, p. 13.

3. *Autobiography*, p. 361.

4. *Ibid*, p. 363.

guided solely by the ideals of the economic betterment of the masses, which ideals unfolded themselves on the basis of practical experiences of life.

A further, and not the least significant of the contributions made by Nehru and the Left Wing group, was the spirit of internationalism that they fostered. To be sure, this had already been done by the communists but the Left group tried to inject it into the politics of the Indian National Congress itself and to popularise it. The politics of the Indian National Congress under Gandhi had so far been mostly nationalistic and whatever element of cosmopolitan outlook there was, was based mainly on philosophic concept of spiritual unity of all human beings, and the consequential brotherhood of all nations and races. Beginning with the Nagpur Congress, the Congress had occasionally passed such resolutions. Speaking about this P. Sittaramayya wrote : "The vision of Gandhi is a complete circle with its centre in India and the circle is not intersected by any other circle."¹ But internationalism for Jawaharlal Nehru was based on a distinct world outlook. Firstly, it followed from the realization that no nation in the modern world can afford to live in isolation. Modern discoveries, progress in science and technology have conquered space and time and have made the world one. To cut oneself adrift from the growing contact between nations and races was to shut oneself off from the best human achievements in arts, science and literature. Similarly, he reasoned, egocentrism led to India's downfall in the past. Nehru's internationalism derived its greatest depth and force from his common feeling with exploited peoples. Their cause, he believed, was the same the world over, and the Indian people must link their efforts with the struggle of other exploited peoples. His internationalism had become integrated with his socialism and with the impressions of his visit to Soviet Russia. From this time onwards Nehru became the spokesman of the Congress on world affairs.

1. *Introduction to Y. G. Kriparamurti: Jawaharlal Nehru.*

In regard to the technique of struggle, the Left Wing wanted the action of peasants and workers to be combined with any future movement of the Congress. One of their members, Bose, expressed what was the correct relationship of labour to the nationalist movement when he wrote :

“Organised, disciplined labour is being harnessed to the coach of nationalism. More and more labour is being identified with the national movement In any campaign of non-cooperation Labour will pull its full weight on the people’s side.”¹

But they were not clear as to what form the association of workers and peasants with the Congress would take, whether it would take the form of affiliation of these bodies to the Congress or whether the new policy would be a mere enlargement of the previous policy of talking of their grievances and appealing to them to support the Congress movement.

This socialist outlook penetrated down to the Labour Movement, and arising with the activities of the Left Wing group, there developed a popular movement of a socialist character as distinct from the movement led by the communists.

The Congress Left thus did a lot in getting the political aims of the Congress clarified; they popularised socialism by spotlighting the achievements of the Soviet Union and thus made socialism respectable both inside and outside the Congress, and they attempted to draw the Congress nearer the masses of peasants, workers, students and youth. If they could not play a more effective role and were, on many occasions, hesitant and half-hearted, this was very largely due to the nebulous, incoherent nature and method of their work. Firstly, they posited the twin goals of national independence and socialism but were not able to make out the exact relationship between these two aims, specially in the context of the situations then obtaining in India. On occasions they themselves admitted that the

¹ See, *Annual Register, 1929, Vol. II, p. 36.*

question of socialism and communism would arise only in free India. Hard pressed by their opponents in that case to justify the preaching of socialism which might impair national unity, they only maintained that the talk of socialism helped to clarify the aims and methods of national struggle. This indeed was their vulnerable point and in the years that followed the Right made a systematic criticism on this score.

Secondly, they did not succeed in building up a coherent socialist ideology and probably deliberately they wanted it to be vague and undefined except stating certain general principles. This lack of clarity and definiteness was criticised in the same manner as they themselves had criticised the vague nationalist goal of Swaraj a few years earlier. Thirdly, they were not always clear as to the form of association of the workers, peasants, students and youth with the Congress and their participation in the movements started by it. Fourthly, they were not always categorical as to their own work inside the Congress. Thus speaking of the work by the Independence League Narendra Dev, in a letter to Nehru dated February 9, 1929 admitted that 'the idea of most of us is vague and most of us don't know how to proceed.'¹ Fifthly, the group was beset with inner and secret rivalry between Nehru and Bose. With all his radical ideology Nehru's allegiance to the Congress in general and to Mahatma Gandhi in particular was unimpeachable and he was prepared to subordinate himself to them both if the exigency of the national movement so demanded. The Bose group talked less of socialism but it valued action more than talks and wanted to activate the Congress organizations. It did not appreciate what it called the 'surrender' of Nehru to Gandhi on crucial occasions. The Bose group showed its anger for the first time at the Karachi Congress (1931) which accorded seal of approval to the Delhi Pact. Opposed to the policy of compromise, Bose wanted the Congress to resume struggle and to start with the establishment of parallel government

1. In Nehru: *A bunch of old letters*, p. 70.

based on local Congress Committees. The secret rivalry between these two unrivalled leaders of youth came into open in the late thirties to the detriment of the national organization.

Origin of Youth Movements

The same process of radicalisation which led to the birth of the Congress Left also led to the emergence of various other organizations of the younger sections of Indians, some of which were under the leadership of Congressmen, while others remained outside.

The youth movement in India dates from the year 1905 when, consequent upon a general nationalist outburst following the partition of Bengal, many young students from the university joined the Swadeshi and Boycott Movements. But dissatisfaction with the politics of the Moderates, along with some other factors, turned many of them into terrorists and revolutionaries. The Non-Cooperation Movement under Gandhian leadership (1920-22) had the effect of weaning away many of them from the path of terrorism, but with the suspension of that movement many of them again reverted to their original methods. To be sure, some temporary organizations of youth had emerged during the demonstrations and hartals conducted in connection with the Gandhian movement, but organizationally speaking, they died out, many of their members having joined the Congress, though stray youth organizations plodded on.

Whatever its form, till the middle of the twenties of the present century, the youth movement remained confined to the realization of nationalist urges and aspirations, and did not touch upon social-economic problems. Socialism, when it emerged in the late twenties, exerted three-fold influence upon the youth. From the mid-twenties some came under the influence of the communists and joined the Young Communist Leagues organized by them. Their activities were indistinguishable from the general communist activities and to refer to them again would be a mere repetition of what we have already said.

Youth organizations also sprang up under the influence, guidance and direction of those Left elements of the Indian National Congress who were trying to bring about a radicalisation of the nationalist movement. The same nationalist spirit which prompted them to persuade the National Congress to declare for complete independence, to bring it in touch with the masses of workers and peasants, and to talk of socialism and more effective methods, also led them to the youth, for it was thought that the association of the Congress with young elements would make the nationalist movement more effective and that with a group of young people, intellectually well equipped and properly trained, and dedicated to the cause of the country, the national revolution would be speedily led to a successful conclusion.

The result was that many such organizations sprang up in the country as Left platforms of the Indian National Congress and by 1928, along with the Annual Session of the Indian National Congress, such youth organizations as the All-India Youth League, the Swadhin Bharat Sangh, the All-India Socialist Youth League, the All-India Volunteer Corps, the All-India Independence League, could hold their conferences. Besides, students' organizations were also coming into being. The same Left leaders of the Indian National Congress, that is, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Lala Lajpat Rai, K. F. Nariman, etc. were also prominent in these youth organizations.

To begin with, these organizations had only nationalist aspirations but later some of them started showing socialistic leanings. Most of them, it is true, were socialist in name only, and the only activity in connection with which they came to the forefront were demonstrations organized for boycott of the Simon Commission, and later on with the Civil Disobedience Movements. Many demonstrations were organised against the Simon Commission. Leaders active in it were J. Nehru, Narendra Dev, etc. in U.P., Subhas Chandra Bose in Bengal, Lala Lajpat Rai in the Punjab (he died as a result of police assault in one of these demonstrations), T. Prakasam in Madras, Yusuf Meherally

and K. F. Nariman in Bombay, etc. We shall not, therefore, detain ourselves with any analysis of their activities but choose for our analysis the activities of those student and youth organizations which leaned towards socialism.

Two such noteworthy youth organizations were the All-India Youth Congress and the All-India Socialist Youth Congress. There was also another body called the All-India Socialist Youth League. Organizationally haphazard and ideologically incoherent, they were a true reflection of the persons who manned them. They first attempted to come to the limelight from towards the end of 1928 when they held their conferences on the occasion of the annual session of the National Congress. An idea of the nature and method of their work can be gleaned from an analysis of their deliberations.

The All-India Youth Congress met before the Congress session at Calcutta under the Presidentship of K. F. Nariman of Bombay. Subhas Chandra Bose was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. Among the 5,000 youth who attended the Congress, there were youth from different parts of the country but a majority of them were Bengalis. There were bitter revolutionary speeches but accent was much more on independence than on socialism. Emphasis was given on a philosophy of actionism. Nariman urged to Bardolise India. The Congress welcomed the efforts of the League against Imperialism and declared that the cause of the W. & P. P. was the cause of the youth.¹ The tendencies of the Socialist Youth Congress can be abstracted from the proceedings and resolutions of its first Congress held at Calcutta on 27th December, 1928 under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru.² Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutt was the Chairman of the Reception Committee.

Like all other organizations initiated by the Left Congressmen, it declared that it uncompromisingly stood for complete independence. It condemned the two Bills,

1. *All-India Youth Congress, Calcutta, 1928.*
2. *Annual Register, 1928, p. 453.*

the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill, that had been pending in the Legislative Assembly.

It passed resolutions expressive of the general socialist and Marxist trends in ideas that it was fast becoming a fashion to adopt, and it considered itself chosen by destiny to spread these ideas. In his Presidential Address Nehru himself remarked that the task of young intellectuals was to explain socialism to the masses, and that "they must work and prepare a band of militant groups to carry out their ideas."¹ In common with Nehru and the Left leaders the Youth Congress believed that the nationalist movement must be given a new orientation by propagating the 'Marxist world view.'² Cooperation with socialist and other youth organizations outside India was also to be maintained.³ It claimed that it stood for scientific socialism.

This Congress was not exclusively under the control of Congressmen. Even some communists held importance in it which was reflected in the resolutions of the Congress in favour of communism and dictatorship of the proletariat. The resolution on Communism stated that 'considering the present social, political and economic conditions of the country Communism is the only way of realising complete social, political and economic freedom with all their implications.'

The same resolution remarked : "This Congress of the Socialist Youth of India is of opinion that the dictatorship of the proletariat as the vanguard of all exploited and oppressed elements of Indian Society including the peasant masses, should be a necessary stage in the country, for complete economic, social and political equality of the Indian people and the emancipation of the masses from the thralldom of their common enemy, the Indian bourgeoisie and British Imperialism."⁴

1. *Ibid.*, p. 454.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 455.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 455.

Among the other persons associated with this Congress were Gopal Chandra Basak and Jyotish Chandra Ghosh.

The All-India Socialist Youth League aimed at the establishment of a Socialist Republic in India. Its programme aimed at (a) propagating the ideas and methods of scientific socialism among the youth of India as expounded by Marx and Lenin, (b) organising study circles, (c) carrying struggle against communalism, racialism, castism and religion, (d) organising trade unions and peasant unions, and (e) organising youth corps and young pioneers with uniform. According to its constitution any young man and woman under 36 and holding socialistic views could be its member. The League worked under the direction of a Central Executive Body. The All-India League was a federation of provincial Leagues. It adopted the international Red Flag as its insignia.

At the same time the youth movement also came under the influence of Indian terrorist, revolutionaries. They were one with the old terrorists and with the pre-war revolutionaries in that they believed in the use of individual and group violence in attaining their ends. But they differed from them in that they slowly moved towards socialism. The revolutionaries were active in the Punjab, U.P., Bengal and Bihar, but the Bengal section was most influential. The revolutionaries in the Punjab formed the Nawjawan Bharat Sabha (Indian Youth Association) at Lahore in 1925.¹ Bhagat Singh, its leader and founder, was its General Secretary. The Sabha consisted of radical students and youth elements and had the support of many Leftist Congressmen like Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew. The Sabha carried propaganda in favour of socialism and emphasized the necessity of strong action against the British rule. The Sabha acquired popularity and became a rallying point of revolutionaries. They had also contact with the Punjab Kirti-Kisan Party. In 1928 they issued a Manifesto of the Sabha, embodying its principles and programme. The Manifesto put emphasis on mass revolution-

1. *Gopal Thakur : Bhagat Singh, the man and his ideas, p. 4.*

ary action and gave the slogan of Swaraj by and for the masses. But by mass revolution they meant peasant revolution combined with terrorism. In September, 1928, at a conference of revolutionaries from U.P., Punjab, Rajasthan and Bihar under the inspiration from Bhagat Singh, Sukh Deo, etc. they formed 'The Hindustan Socialist Republican Association' which declared as its goal the winning of independence and the establishment of a Socialist Republican State.¹ They also constituted a Central Committee of the Association. It is by their socialistic aims that they are to be distinguished from the old revolutionaries and placed inside the history of the Socialist Movement. At the same time, their kind of socialism was not of any standard pattern; they were neither fully Marxist nor socialist, though they occasionally talked of both.² Ajoy Ghosh recalls : "Such was our socialism in those days. We had lost faith in the existing national leadership, its constitutionalism, its slogan of boring from within disgusted us. And we looked upon ourselves as men who by their examples would create the basis for the rise of a new leadership. Socialism for us was an ideal."^{2a}

But the object for which they seemed gradually to be working was 'a revolution which would end exploitation of man by man.'³ They wanted to change 'the present order of things which is based on manifest injustice.'⁴ According to them this injustice consisted in the fact that the "Producers or labourers, in spite of being the most necessary elements of society, are robbed by their exploiters of the fruits of their labour."⁵ Therefore, they thought it necessary that a reorganization of society on a socialist basis should take place after the capture of power, and a new social order founded. For the uprooting of the old social order and creation of a new one, 'capture of State

1. *Ajoy Ghosh : Bhagat Singh and his comrades*, p. 5.

2. *Thakur*, *Ibid*, p. 6.

2a. *Ghosh*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 4-5.

3. *Ibid*, p. 9.

4. *Op. Cit.*, p. 36.

5. *Op. Cit.*, p. 36.

power is necessary.¹ They, therefore, gave primacy to fight for independence.

What, however, kept them aloof from the main body of socialists was that they did not recognize the necessity of organizing peasants and workers for the realization of their socialist ideal. Ajoy Ghosh, himself one of the revolutionaries, avers : "As for the most important question, however, the question in what manner the fight for freedom and socialism was to be waged, armed action by individuals and groups was to remain our immediate task."^{1a} They, thus, believed that armed action alone would be able to effect a revolution.² They considered terrorism as a necessary phase of revolution : "Terrorism is not complete without revolution and revolution is not complete without terrorism."³ It was **this** insistence upon armed action by individuals or groups as a necessary preliminary to revolution which distinguished them from communists and kept them aloof from their organizations, although, at one stage they had planned to establish contacts with the communists.

On April 8, 1929 Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt threw bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly, and hurled HSRA leaflets. Bhagat Singh and many other revolutionaries were arrested and thus started the famous Lahore Conspiracy Case. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdeo and Rajguru were sentenced to death and executed early in 1931; many were sentenced to transportation for life. With this ended a phase of terrorist, revolutionary movement for independence.

While these revolutionaries languished in jail, some of them like Bhagat Singh moved fast in the direction of Marxian-socialism, though they never became its cent per cent adherents. Some of them also became convinced of the futility of terrorism and came more unequivocally in

1. *Ibid*, p. 37.

1a. *Ghosh, Op. Cit*, p. 4.

2. *Ibid*, p. 40.

3. *Ibid*, p. 41.

favour of mass action of workers, peasants and youth. Bhagat Singh, the leader, pioneered this line of approach as is evidenced from the letters that he wrote from jail as well as from his utterances in the court.

The Peasant Movement

In viewing the complex of movements and political groupings that constitute this period of transition when socialism was a growing force inside and outside the National Congress, we have to take note of the peasant movement.

Earlier we have seen how after the World War One the same economic reasons which led the workers to indulge in a wave of spontaneous strikes, also led the peasants in different parts of the country to launch movements for the eradication of the immediate economic disabilities from which they suffered. We have also seen how these movements later became linked up with the Non-Cooperation Movement, though both movements retained their separate identities.

These peasant movements were not merely political but mostly economic and because of this two important phenomena arose. In some areas as soon as the immediate grievances which had inspired the peasant movements had been met the peasants' enthusiasm for the Non-Cooperation Movement rapidly cooled down; while in other areas where these grievances still persisted in an acute form the peasant movements continued even after the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation. In Chapter III we have already referred to these movements taking place in different parts of the country, specially in the U.P., the Punjab, Bihar, Bengal, Maharashtra and Andhra. These movements assumed different forms in different areas and radical Congressmen of leftist leanings took active part in these. The communists also made attempts to penetrate the countryside, specially in Bengal and the Punjab, but, by and large, the peasant movements remained under the leadership of Congressmen.

Often these movements were undertaken independent of the Indian National Congress, though in most of them

Congressmen in their individual capacities were prominent. This imparted not only independent nature to these immediate struggles but even to the peasant movements as a whole and initiated the process leading to the formation of independent class organizations of peasants. In this, no doubt, the fact that the Non-Cooperation was withdrawn without achieving the grievances of the peasants also played a part. Another reason was that the Congressmen, who led these movements and to whom the peasants turned instinctively for leadership, had to function within the framework of Congress ideology and programme and they not only did not countenance any movement against the agrarian system as such but they counselled patience even in respect of movements that might lead to any stranglement of the interests of landlords and higher sections of the peasantry.

There are manifold difficulties connected with the formation of peasant organizations. In their outlook and reasoning peasants are typically conservative and individualistic; being dependent upon nature makes them superstitious, defeatist and fatalistic. They are dispersed populations scattered over a wide area; as a social class they are not homogeneous.¹ Under the circumstances, the difficult task of organizing peasants devolves mostly upon non-peasant middle class. Fortunately, the process of developments in the social, economic and political fields in post-war years had been not only to generate a new consciousness but also to arouse a new hope among the peasants. Furthermore, one of the results of the alliance of the peasants with the political movement of the National Congress had been the disappearance of the traditional outlook of the peasantry to look up to the landed aristocracy as their natural leaders and to begin to look up to the new leadership of the middle class, as represented by the Congress, for relief and support.² This relationship had its impact upon the outlook of these leaders themselves who

1. A. R. Desai : *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, p. 35.

2. N. Dev : *Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 35.

threw overboard their attitude of indifference to the peasants and to other working masses and started becoming interested in their grievances. It was this contact which led some of them towards organising the independent class organizations of peasants in the days after the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Among the earliest of these organizations were those in South India where N. G. Ranga took a prominent part in their formation. An Indian who had graduated from Oxford, he came under the influence of the socialists and communists of Great Britain in his student days in 1922. Among those he came in contact with were : G. D. H. Cole, H. N. Brailsford, Hobson, Ellen Wilkinson, Page Arnot and R. P. Dutt. He also visited France, Germany and Italy to study Peasant, Labour and Cooperative organizations there.

After his return from England in 1923 he advocated the organization of occupational guilds for peasants and workers on the lines of the guilds then being advocated in the West. In 1923 he also initiated the organization of peasants in Guntur district in Andhra.¹ He stood for independent class organizations of peasants and asked the radical-minded Congressmen to help in organising them. He also advocated organization of agricultural labourers. He had returned from Europe a convinced socialist and he was, in his own words, "full of admiration for the Russian experiments, and ambition to rouse our toiling masses to achieve a similar social revolution."²

Apart from taking part in these early organizations of peasants he was busy administering to the local and day-to-day needs of peasantry. For this purpose he carried out researches, on the lines of the Fabians, on different problems of peasantry. Statistical works on rural problems were already being carried on by Professor Radha Kamal Mukherjee in North India and men like Drs. Gilbert Statir, Harold Mann, etc. in South India. Ranga himself carried

1. Ranga : *Modern Indian Peasant*, p. 15.
2. Ranga : *Revolutionary Peasants*, p. 60.

on some enquiries and published two volumes of "Economic Organization of Indian Villages". He also took part in the formation of the South Indian Kisan Federation. The latter called for the abolition of the Zamindari system, and this advanced policy ultimately came to be adopted by the All-India Kisan Sabha (Peasant Organization) when it was formed in 1935 to which we shall return in a later chapter. In 1929, in his Presidential Address to the Second Andhra Ryots' Conference, Ranga declared the aim of Kisan Movement to be Kisan Raj (Peasants' Rule).

Peasant leaders were also active in Bihar, U.P., Bengal and the Punjab. We shall refer to them in the chapters that follow.

CONCLUSION

From 1929 to 1933 there emerged inside the National Congress itself a Left Wing which became gradually socialist-orientated. At the same time, youth and peasant movements were also becoming socialist-minded. All these elements emphasized as their goals complete independence and socialism. Organizationally and ideologically they paved the way for the founding of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934.

CHAPTER SIX

CONGRESS SOCIALISM (1934-39)

Birth of the Congress Socialist Party

The Congress Socialist Party was founded in 1934 on the morrow of the withdrawal of the Second Civil Disobedience Movement for national freedom launched by the Indian National Congress. It was the institutional expression of the left wing tendencies that we described in the last chapter. Nebulous and heterogeneous though these tendencies were they, nevertheless, created a climate of thought and opinion which was bound sooner or later to give rise to an indigenous, organised left movement inside the National Congress.

It is quite reasonable to suppose that, but for the intervention of the Civil Disobedience Movement, this step would have been taken earlier, in the light of the demands of the groups, who were to form the C.S.P., for a more vigorous and effective nationalist policy. In fact, the Civil Disobedience campaigns, for which they had vigorously clamoured, only delayed the formation of a separate Party.

The desire for socialist expression had been strong enough, even during the Civil Disobedience campaigns, to make possible the emergence of socialist organisations.

Socialist groups were formed in three or four provinces. The Bihar Socialist Party, which was later to become the spearhead of the socialist movement in India, was formed in July 1931, though the Civil Disobedience Movement intercepted its work.¹

Among the persons associated with the inception of the Bihar Party were Jai Prakash Narain, Phulan Prasad Varma and Rahul Sankrityayana (then known as

1. N. Dev: *Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 25.

Baba Ramodar Dās). The object of the Party, which bore resemblance to a Fabian Society, spoke of the establishment of a Socialist State which would not recognise right to private property and which would emancipate land and capital from individual and class ownership and vest them in the community so that the advantages might be equally shared by the members of the community. Its immediate objects were : (a) dissemination of socialist ideas, (b) organization of labour and peasants. The Party constituted an organising committee with Abdul Bari as President, and P. P. Varma, Ganga Sharan Sinha and Baba Ramodar Das as Secretaries. Ambika Kant Sinha became the Treasurer.¹ Early in 1934 the Party also established a Socialist Research Institute at Patna.

Socialist groups were formed in U.P. and in Delhi in 1933. The socialists in Bombay, like Yusuf Meherally, M. R. Masani, Achyut Patwardhan and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, formed the Bombay Socialist Party towards the end of 1933.

The socialists were also active in Banaras. Sampurnanand, whom the communists in the twenties had unsuccessfully tried to convert, recalls that as early as March, 1930 he had elaborated a socialist programme which was later published in the form of a booklet entitled "When We are in Power". It included such items as abolition of Zamindari with compensation, nationalisation of key industries and principal means of transport, fixation of minimum wages and maximum hours of work, provision of work or maintenance, old age pensions, total prohibition, etc.²

The Banaras group formed a Socialist Party early in May, 1934, just on the eve of the Patna Conference. The persons concerned were Sampurnanand, Paripurmanand, Tarapada Bhattacharya, Kamalapati Tripathi, etc.

1. *Manindra Narayan Ray : The Bihar I Knew, in the Indian Nation, November, 9, 1964.*
2. *Sampurnanand : Memories and reflections, p. 73.*

The Punjab Socialist Party, an outgrowth of the Nawjawan Bharat Sabha, was formed in September, 1933. It grew out of the resentment of the Sabha at the results of the Karachi Congress. The Party claimed itself to be Marxist and was under the influence of the communists till it affiliated to the C.S.P. in 1936. M. J. Lal Kapur was the first President of the Party, and Firoz Chand the first Secretary. Its headquarter was at Lahore. Its declared object was the establishment of a new economic order in which the worker would be entitled to the full benefit of his labour, and in which there would not be exploitation of one class by another. In the new set up instruments of production would be owned by the people. As an immediate aim it desired nationalisation of land and of such large-scale industries as could, with advantage, be transferred to the community.

Socialist-minded trade unionists also formed a Socialist Party, known as the All-India Working Class Party, at Jabbalpore in 1934. Shivanath Banerjee, Charuchandra Chatterjee, Hariharnath Shastri, Dr. V. Mukherjee, etc. were associated with it. It stood for the establishment of a socialistic republic by the complete overthrow of capitalism and control of the economic life of the country by workers' and peasants' councils. The immediate task of the Party was to achieve complete national independence from the standpoint of the working class.

As already mentioned, the Nawjawan Bharat Sabha which, in the late twenties, started as a militant youth organization, was becoming increasingly socialist-minded and at its Conference, held on 27th March, 1931 with S. C. Bose in the chair, it expressed itself in favour of a Republican India and stated that the Congress programme could not win freedom for India, and, therefore, it constructed a programme which spoke of organising the peasants and workers on a socialist basis, organising the youth, countryside propaganda etc.¹ There also took place many 'Peasants' Day and 'Labour Day' celebrations at which

1. *Indian Annual Register, 1931, Vol. I, p. 385.*

resolutions were passed in favour of the political struggle in the country. They were indicative of the growing political consciousness among peasants and workers.¹

In 1934, for the first time, an attempt was made to organise the socialist movement on an all-India basis. In this connection it is also noteworthy that more or less similar tendencies that were released after the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922² were to be observed after this event also. There were recrudescences of similar terrorist and revolutionary activities and the communal elements also raised their head at the time. Inside the Congress groups emerged on the pattern of the Swaraj Party. Swaraj parties were formed in Bombay and Madras in 1933 and there was the revival of the old Swaraj Party itself on an all-India basis in 1934 under the leadership of B. C. Roy, Ansari, Satyamurti and B. Desai.³ Like its prototype of the twenties it based itself on constitutional agitation and legislative activities.

The change that took place in the mood of the left wing forces was by far the most significant, entering to the trade unions which were increasingly coming in favour of participation in the national struggle. A resolution of the A.I.T.U.C. on the subject pointed to the necessity "in the political interests of workers and peasants of India to form a political party of peasants and workers on the platform of fundamental resolution of the Trade Union Congress in order to give them a correct lead in the political struggle of the country."⁴ This was the projected All-India Working Class Party which we have already mentioned.

In the political field, where the new trend had its most important and lasting effects, the C.S.P. was formed; it was to become the most important left wing party in India

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1932, Vol. I, *Chronicle of Events*.
2. Chapter II, *beginning*.
3. *Indian Annual Register*, 1934, Vol. I, p. 261.
4. *Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. II, p. 410. We shall describe this development in the trade union field along with its general account in Chapter VII.

after the Communist Party, and in terms of popularity, better than any other left party.

Idea germinates in the Nasik Prison

The blue-prints of the Congress Socialist Party were laid down in 1933 by a few young convicts of the Civil Disobedience Movement lodged in the Nasik Central Prison.¹ They were : Jai Prakash Narain, Ashok Mehta, Achyut Patwardhan, Yusuf Meherally, M. R. Masani, N. G. Gore, S. M. Joshi and M. L. Dantwala.² The Civil Disobedience Movement had exhausted its momentum and a decision for its withdrawal had already been taken, though the formal decision had still to be taken by the A.I.C.C.

The old Swaraj Party was being revived by the Roy-Ansari group to renew the nationalist movement along constitutional and parliamentary lines, but this neo-constitutional approach did not appeal to this young group of socialists in the Nasik prison.³ They took the view that the Congress Civil Disobedience Movement had failed for the second time to attain its objectives. Socialists, born of the nationalist movement, they started to analyse the political situation, the Civil Disobedience Movement, its merits and demerits, and as socialists they came to the conclusion that two things required to be done immediately : to check the drift to neo-constitutionalism and to put the nationalist movement on a fundamentally new basis if it was ever to be effective. With these ends in view they decided to form a socialist group inside the Indian National Congress itself.⁴

By this decision they initiated a process of organising socialist groups and yet remaining within the Indian National Congress, which was emulated by some other minor leftist groups and parties that were formed later. In this they were notably different from the Communist Party.

1. Y. Meherally : *Leaders of India*, Vol. II, p. 51.

2. Introduction of Y. Meherally in J. P. Narain's "*Towards Struggle*", p. 9.

3. Y. Meherally : *Leaders of India*, Vol. II, p. 52.

4. J. P. Narain's "*Towards Struggle*".

The Communist Party, alone of all leftist parties, was completely independent, both in its origin and subsequent development, to the Indian National Congress, though most of them continued to be members of the National Congress and also worked in that organization till 1929. All other leftist groups first originated as opposition groups within the Indian National Congress, their immediate point of departure being their difference and dissatisfaction with some phase or other of the Congress policy and programme. The aloofness of the communists from the Civil Disobedience Movement and their attitude of hostility to the Congress was also one of the compelling factors to organise the C.S.P.

The very fact that these Congress socialists decided to form a socialist group inside the Indian National Congress indicated also their close relationship with the nationalist movement that it represented. They accepted the fact that the Indian National Congress was the main nationalist organization in the country from whose platform the nationalist struggle for freedom could be carried on,¹ no other organization in the country was organizationally strong enough to accomplish this task and, therefore, according to them, to leave the Congress was to isolate oneself from the Nationalist Movement.² Hence their policy was to work as an opposition group inside the Congress itself, to support it and strengthen it, and thus to make it a fit instrument for the national struggle.

Closely connected to this fact of their acknowledgment of the pivotal position of the Congress in the national struggle was the fact that they gave primary importance to the achievement of national independence.³

But these young intellectuals saw fundamental weakness in the Indian National Congress as an organization, which rendered it ineffective as an instrument of the

1. *N. Dev : Samyavada Ka Bigula (in Hindi), p. 32.*

2. *N. Dev : Socialism and National Revolution, p. 35.*

3. *Sixth Annual Conference Report of the Socialist Party, p. 39.*

national movement. Firstly, the Congress was not a mass organization in the proper sense of the term. True, the Congress professed to be a mass organization and even Gandhi in his speech at the Round Table Conference had retorted that the Congress represented the dumb millions,¹ but, according to these socialists, there was neither the organizational nor the ideological basis for this claim. In this connection it is instructive to note what the official report of this period on moral and material progress in India has to say about the Indian National Congress : "The Congress Party is pre-eminently the party of privilege and vested interests. Genuine representatives of labour, whether urban or rural, have no part or lot in control of any of even the local branches of the Congress Party, for this is firmly held in the hands of classes privileged by birth and wealth."² Writing at the time Jawaharlal Nehru said : "though the mass basis is there it is not reflected in the organizational side and hence an inherent weakness in our activities."³

Ideologically speaking, the Congress really had no socio-economic programme for the uplift of the masses or the organization of society in New India. It had no message for the peasants and workers but only vague utterances. Its programme was mostly political and even that was not always clear. Speaking at the first Conference of the Socialists at Patna in 1934. N. Dev observed that Congressmen had so far approached the masses in the name of democracy

1. Gandhi had said : "Above all, the Congress represents, in its essence the dumb semi-starved millions scattered over length and breadth of land If there is a genuine clash of interests, I have no hesitation in saying, on behalf of the Congress, that the Congress will sacrifice every interest for the sake of the interests of these dumb millions (P. Sitaramayya : *History of National Congress*, p. 735). It is to be noted in this connection that Indian Socialists of later years have pointed out the ineffectiveness of this utterance of Gandhi by pointing to the 'escape words' 'and if there is a genuine clash of interest', which, these critics point out, is not, according to the Gandhian theory of harmony of labour and Capital. (M. N. Roy : *Essays of Twentieth century*, p. 25).
2. J. Coatman : *Years of Destiny (India—1926-32)*, p. 145.
3. J. Nehru : *India and the World*, p. 29.

and freedom but these were not understood by the masses and consequently it could not enthuse them.¹

This separation of the Congress from the peasants and workers found expression also in the aloofness of the Congress organization from the people and from the latter's indifference to the Congress and its activities.² Not only had the working class struggle, according to these socialists, no organic connection with the Congress movement, but the working class had been very slightly touched by it,³ with the result that the Congress was not in a position to launch a political strike of workers.⁴ This was the reason why the Congress movements had failed. The first appeal of the Congress was to individuals. Speaking at the Congress Socialists' Conference, M. R. Masani, the then General Secretary of the All-India Congress Socialists Party, said: "Socialists felt that the Civil Disobedience Movements failed because of inadequate mass response."⁵ And, therefore, they as socialists felt the need of a more dynamic orientation in the outlook and programme of the Congress,⁶ and to bring it into organic relationship with the organization of peasants and workers. Thus Purushottamdas Tricumdas, Chairman of the Reception Committee of the First All-India Congress Socialist Conference, said: "We represent today the elements who, having fought for nearly three years and having realised the limitation, both ideological and organizational, inside that great body (i.e. National Congress), are asking for clearer understanding of the nature of the national struggle so that we may not allow weaknesses which were revealed during last four years to continue."⁷

1. N. Dev, *Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 8 .

2. N. Dev, *Samyavada Ka Bigul*, p. 31.

3. N. Dev: *Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 8.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. II, p. 310.

6. Y. Meherally, *Introduction in J.P. Narain, "Towards Struggle"*.

7. *Indian Annual Register*, 1934, p. 298.

*First All-India gathering of the Congress Socialists
at Patna*

It was with this analysis of the Indian National Congress and the Indian political scene that these convicts of the Nasik Prison decided to organise the Congress Socialist Group inside the National Congress. The Civil Disobedience Movement was shortly withdrawn and these prisoners were released. After their release they held a conference at Poona where a decision to start provincial organizations of socialist groups was taken and, as a result, the First Bombay Congress Socialist Group was formed towards the end of 1933.¹ But scarcely had the other provincial leaders the time to organise their own local groups than the All-India Congress Committee met at Patna in May, 1934, to finally formalize the withdrawal of the movement, and at the same time to formulate the future programme for the Congress. One of the chief items placed on the agenda of the Congress required that a decision be taken as to whether or not to return to constitutional and parliamentary methods.

Side by side met another conference of the Socialists from all over India convened by Jai Prakash Narain on behalf of the Bihar Socialist Party. This was the first All-India Conference of the Congress Socialists over which Narendra Dev presided. In the words of its President it was primarily convened "to prevent an outright drift to constitutionalism and to put a more dynamic programme before the country."² Indeed any return to constitutionalism was regarded by them with a grave concern. N. Dev observed : "The future of Congress will much depend on the decision of this single question. The whole movement stands in danger of being deflected from its revolutionary path and if the Congress is again made to travel the old barren path of constitutionalism and reformism it will

1. *Indian Annual Register, 1933. Chronicle of Events.*

2. *Presidential address of N. Dev at Patna Conference, in N. Dev : Socialism and National Revolution.*

turn itself into a morass from which it will not be possible for it to extricate itself.”¹

But though the majority of the delegates were anti-Swarajists, this does not mean that they were no-changers or that they all had the same attitude of hostility towards participation in the Councils. The Bombay Congress Socialist group, for instance, had openly accepted electoral activity as a part of its Socialist programme.² But the Resolution of the Conference itself on Council entry said that the Lahore Congress Resolution, calling upon Congressmen to boycott the Councils, should not be rescinded except by an open session of the Congress.³ It declared that if the Patna Congress, however, decided in favour of Council entry then “the conduct of electoral and parliamentary activity should be in the hands of the Congress organization and such activity should only be in furtherance of a programme which is socialist in action and objective.”⁴ This, in fact, amounted to vetoing the Council entry as the Congress was not expected or prepared to adopt a socialist programme.

The more positive resolution of the Socialist Conference, which was subsequently moved before the All-India Congress Committee for adoption, asked the Congress to adopt a programme that was socialist in action and objective and for that purpose enunciated certain basic political, social and economic principles. The resolution read : “Whereas the preamble of the Fundamental Rights resolution of the Karachi Congress declares that in order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions and whereas, in order to widen the basis of the struggle for independence and ensure that even after Swaraj comes the masses don't remain victims of economic exploitation, it is necessary that the Congress should adopt a programme that is socialist in action and objective, the A.I.C.C. recom-

1. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

2. *Indian Annual Register*, 1934, p. 340.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

mends to the Congress to declare as its objective a socialistic state and after the capture of power to convene a constituent assembly.”¹ The Congress Socialists, therefore, also issued a tentative draft programme at Patna. It is noteworthy that Rajani Mukherjee of Bengal moved that the Party be organised outside the Congress but this was outvoted.

First Conference of the All-India Congress Socialist Party, Bombay

While the Patna Conference was the first All-India Congress Socialists' Conference, the Bombay Conference, held on October 21 and 22, 1934, was the first Conference of the Indian Congress Socialist Party. It was presided over by Sampurnanand. Purushottam Tricumdas was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. The Patna Conference, hastily convened with the immediate negative purpose of checking the drift of the Indian National Congress towards neo-constitutionalism, was largely exploratory both in regard to the organizational problem of uniting the socialists and other radical elements within the Indian National Congress and the ideological problem of formulating a clear-cut programme that could provide the basis of work for such a party. A considerable portion of its deliberations were devoted either to the criticisms of the programme of the National Congress or to what the National Congress should not do. The short programme that it adopted, merely affirmed faith in the ultimate objectives of a socialist state in India and urged the Congress to adopt a programme that was socialistic in action and objective and for this purpose it formulated, in broad outline, the social, economic and political principles on the basis of which the constitution of such a state was to be framed. But it did not clearly define either the organizational or the ideological set-up of the Congress Socialist group, or its relationship to the Indian National Congress. Indeed, it was felt by the Congress Socialists gathered at Patna that final

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1934, p. 344.

decisions on such matters of vital importance should be taken by a formal and representative gathering of socialists from all the provinces in India and that for this purpose immediate steps should be taken to start provincial organizations. The Patna Programme, along with the resolution on Council entry and the parliamentary programme, was intended to be the starting point for the Bombay Conference, a guide to the Organising Secretary in the short period before the Bombay Conference and a basis of work for the provincial organizations that were to be started or that were already in existence.

On the organizational plane, the setting up of the provincial organizations made rapid strides in the period between the Patna Conference and the Bombay Conference, which was evidenced by the fact that while at the time of the Patna Conference, there were only three provincial socialist parties, their number rose to 13 by the time the Bombay Conference took place. These provincial Congress Socialist parties, which sent a total number of 137 delegates to the Bombay Conference, were the following : U.P., Gujarat, Bombay, Maharashtra, Andhra, Bengal, Kerala, Bihar, Delhi, Berar, C.P., Utkal and Aimer¹. It is to be noted that these provincial parties clearly followed the pattern of the Indian National Congress in being formed on the basis of linguistic units and not on the basis of the existing provinces of British India. But while such provincial units of the Indian National Congress were established in pursuance of the recognition of the principle that the provinces be redivided on a linguistic basis, the Congress socialists had not yet given thought to this problem and, working as the organised left wing of the Indian National Congress, they simply followed the inevitable course of establishing a Congress Socialist Party inside each provincial unit of the National Congress.

The Conference elected the following All India Executive of the Party : Jai Prakash Narain, General Secretary; M. R. Masani, Mohan Lal Gautam, N. G. Goray and N. S.

1. Report of First A.I.C.S.P. Conference, 1934.

Namoodripad, Joint Secretaries; Narendra Dev, Sampurnanand, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Purushottam Tri-cumdas, P. Y. Despande, Ram Manohar Lohia, S. M. Joshi, Amarendra Prasad Mitra, Charles Mescarnes, Nabakrishna Chaudhary, and Achyut Patwardhan as members; Yusuf Mcherally, Sorab Batlivala, Rohit Mehta, Faridul Haque Ansari and Ram Briksh Benipuri as additional members.

Controversy with the Congress Right on the formation of the C.S.P.

On the ideological plane, apart from mutual discussions among top leaders about the programme of the Party, the short intervening period between the two Conferences was marked by a serious controversy and a verbal warfare between the Congress Socialist group and the Rightist leaders of the Indian National Congress. As we have previously pointed out,¹ the Indian National Congress and its dominant Right leadership regarded the Congress as the National Organization par excellence and, as such, they did not encourage the idea of the Congress, either directly or indirectly, participating in the class organizations of peasants and workers or of championing their class demands. We have also seen, how a left wing that started taking shape from 1927 had among its objects the linking up of the Indian National Congress with the organizations of the exploited masses, with a view to ensuring their active and purposeful participation in the national movement but till the formation of the Congress Socialist groups, this Left-wing was largely an inchoate and amorphous group whose activities, despite the efforts of some individuals in taking part in the organizations of workers and peasants, remained confined to propaganda and speeches from the platforms of the Congress. Absence of organization and functional understanding left this Left-wing weak, if not wholly ineffective, and the dominant leadership of the Congress had nothing to fear from this Left-wing. In fact, through such resolutions as the Karachi Congress (1931) resolution on

1. *Transition to Congress Socialism, Chapter V.*

Fundamental Rights, it could pacify the individual members of this Left-wing by pointing out that the Congress stood for the establishment of an ideal society after independence and that, in the meanwhile, it was the bounden duty of all Indians, irrespective of caste, creed or class, to preserve national unity by standing behind the banners of the Congress and not to do anything that would have the contrary effect, by starting class organizations or vociferously formulating class demands at that stage. This way of reasoning was not without its effect upon the Left-wing itself which was predominantly nationalist and whose radicalism first originated for nationalistic reasons.

But the appearance of organised Congress Socialist groups offered a challenge to this dominant Congress leadership, and the policy and programme that it had been pursuing. What appeared disturbing to the Right was that organizationally this party proposed to work inside the National Congress and that, therefore, its programme was bound to impair the unity of the Congress, by not only creating a mistrust of the leadership among the Congress rank and file, but also, by setting up one class against another. Above all, the Right disliked this trumpet call of socialism, class-struggle, revolution and the like.

In the circumstances, the National Congress had to decide whether it was advisable to allow such an organization to function inside the Congress, and whether even the tentative programme of this party announced at Patna was in consonance with the creed of the National Congress.

The Working Committee of the Congress, which met at Bombay on 17th June, 1934, passed a resolution on the Congress Socialist Movement which not only clarified the position of the Congress in regard to the movement, but which, in fact, amounted to the assertion that the Congress Socialist Party, as contemplated, should not be formed. However, there was no resolution directly prohibiting its formation. The resolution read : "While the Working Committee welcomes the formation of groups representing different schools of thought, it is necessary, in view of

loose talk about confiscation of private property and the necessity of class war, to remind Congressmen that the Karachi resolution, as finally settled by the A.I.C.C. at Bombay in August, 1931, which already laid down certain principles, neither contemplates confiscation nor advocates class-war. The Working Committee is further of opinion that confiscation and class-war are contrary to the Congress creed of non-violence. At the same time the Working Committee is of opinion that Congress does contemplate wiser and juster use of private property so as to prevent the exploitation of the landless poor and also contemplates a healthier relationship between capital and labour.”¹ Speaking at a public meeting on 1st June, 1934, Mahatma Gandhi similarly had expressed the opinion that he welcomed the Socialist Party within the Congress while objecting to its programme.² He further observed that if class-struggle implied violence, it was certainly against the creed of the Congress, but if the Congress Socialists accepted non-violence, he had no objection to Congressmen participating in such a struggle.

To the Congress Socialists, both the resolution of the Working Committee and the views of Gandhi carried the clear implications of strangling the Congress Socialist Movement at its very birth, for they provided so many ifs and buts that it would be impossible to work as the party proposed. To view with favour the existence of a Socialist Party, without a socialist programme, they felt, was a subtle way of saying that socialist and radical forces inside the Congress should not be organised on party lines. On 22nd June, 1934, therefore, four of the leading members of the C.S.P., Narendra Dev, Jai Prakash Narain, Sri Prakash, and Sampurnanand, issued a statement regarding the above resolution of the Working Committee, describing it as a “deliberate offensive” on the part of the Working Committee.³ Indeed, the Congress Socialists attached such seriousness to this, that the Bombay Conference even

1. *Indian Annual Register, 1934, Vol. I, p. 300.*

2. *Indian Annual Register, 1934, Vol. II, News.*

3. *Indian Annual Register, 1934, Vol. I, 344.*

passed a separate resolution on the resolution of the Working Committee.¹ Since their party proposed to work inside the Congress, it was not contrary to the Congress creed. In fact, on this point they were on quite unassailable ground, for the constitution of the Indian National Congress provided for all 'legitimate and peaceful means' and not for non-violence as the Working Committee resolution assumed. In this connection, it is noteworthy that shortly after this, Gandhi moved an amendment to the Congress constitution for the replacement of the words 'legitimate and peaceful' in the first article of the constitution by "truthful and non-violence", but the amendment was not accepted by the Subjects Committee of the Congress and the 1934 Constitution adopted the original creed.² The Socialist leaders also asserted that there was nothing in their programme which was contrary to that 'peaceful and legitimate' creed, which they proposed to follow scrupulously : "The very fact that we are in the Congress means that we accept the principles of using peaceful and legitimate means", they said.³ The resolution of the first conference of the party in Bombay also emphatically asserted that participation in class-struggle and advocacy of the expropriation of property were not in any way inconsistent with the Congress creed.⁴

As regards the accusation of class-war, they averred that "to speak of the necessity of creating a thing which is ever-present is meaningless. The question is not of creating a class-war but of deciding which side we should take in that war, the oppressed or the oppressor". Their aim as Socialists, they said, was no doubt, the ultimate abolition of all class struggle by having a classless society. Their programme aimed at curing the existing society of this cancer of class-war.

1. *Report of the First Socialist Conference.*
2. *Dr. N. V. Rajkumar : Development of the Congress Constitution, pp. 68-69.*
3. *Op. Cit., p. 345.*
4. *Report of First Conference, Resolution.*

They also refuted the allegation that their programme advocated confiscation of private property. What this programme provided for was a progressive socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange. This did mean a gradual abolition of private property in certain spheres. It did not mean abolition of all private property.¹ Moreover, the programme, as laid down by the Patna resolution, was meant to be brought in force by the Indian state after political freedom had been achieved. The Working Committee, according to them, could not bind the future Indian state to the creed of non-violence.

It is to be noted in this connection that this indulgence on the part, both of the Congress Right and the Congress Socialists, in criticism of each other's policy and programme, did not cease even after the A.I.C.S.P. had been formally established at the First Conference of the Party at Bombay, but continued in varied form throughout the existence of the C.S.P., except during the period of the World War II, when the Congress Socialists, for all practical purposes, ceased to be interested in socialism as such and came increasingly to assume the role of uncompromising nationalists. In this mood they, like the Congress Right, emphasized more and more the importance of national unity. Often this spate of criticism and counter-criticism, assumed serious proportion, specially in early years, and at times, it was brought not only to the level of allegations and counter-allegations, but also to the level of personal attacks. The latter particularly left an atmosphere of mutual distrust, rancour and bitterness.

To revert to the immediate aspect of this controversy, in the light of the aforesaid Working Committee resolution, and the repercussions that it was likely to have on the organizational future of the C.S.P., it has to be remembered that each side tried to justify its respective stand by reference to the Congress creed and the self-same Independence Resolution of the Lahore Congress (1929) and the Fundamental Rights resolutions of the Karachi Congress

1. *Ibid.*, p. 345.

(1931). The Congress Socialists argued that they wanted the Congress to work out in practice the implications of these resolutions, that they were no less Congressmen than other Congressmen and that they, in fact, were the real custodians of the honour of the National Congress, the preservers of its prestige and the real continuators of the National Movement that the Congress symbolized.¹ Moreover, they contended that as Congressmen representing a particular tendency, they were well-entitled to the propagation and advocacy of their views from the Congress platforms, so as to be able to convert the majority to their view. Under the circumstances, the controversy revolved around the academic—rather legal—question as to which side was being more faithful to the Congress. Moreover, the Congress Right was in an unenviable position, for despite its aversion to the project and programme of the C.S.P., it could not take any precipitate action in preventing either the formation of the party or move for its expulsion from the Congress when it was formed. The constitution of the Congress did not contain any article which could preclude the formation, by Congressmen, of groups or organizations not inconsistent with the creed of the Congress. Any such action could not only have further deepened the mistrust of the Congress, on the part of the Workers' and Peasants' unions existing outside the Congress, which, especially after the Second Civil Disobedience Movement, were coming increasingly to hold that the Congress was more solicitous of the interests of the landlords and the capitalists; but also it would not have been well received by that section of Left Congressmen themselves who, while they had kept aloof from the C.S.P. and were not, in fact, in full agreement with its policy and programme, were of the view that the C.S.P. might still play an important role in the development of the national movement. Some of them were even of the view that propagation of socialism as an idea was

1. *Presidential Speech of Narendra Dev to Gujarat Congress Socialist Conference in 1935*, in N. Dev : *Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 73.

not only not wrong, but even desirable. The most outstanding leader of this view was Jawaharlal Nehru, whom the Congress Socialists were looking upon as their intellectual god-father,¹ and with whom they exchanged greetings on several subsequent occasions. While it is hazardous to assess a movement in terms of one personality, in this case it is difficult to withhold the surmise that the pronounced socialistic views of Nehru, along with the affectionate regards in which he was held by the Mahatma, entered the calculations of the Working Committee in not taking any precipitate action regarding the Congress Socialist Movement, as also its old policy of containing the left forces.

Decisions of the Bombay Conference

Be that as it may, despite this verbal warfare, the first conference of the A.I.C.S.P. took place on the scheduled date in October, 1934. It was attended by 137 delegates from 13 provincial organizations. It was at this conference that the constitution of the C.S.P. was adopted, and its comprehensive programme, outlining not only the final objectives of the party but also the immediate lines of action both inside and outside the Congress were formulated.

The constitution, as adopted at this conference, established the structure of the Party. According to it the name of the Party was to be All India Congress Socialist Party. The highest executive organ of the National Party was the Executive Committee of the Party consisting of one General Secretary, four Joint Secretaries and eleven ordinary members, all elected by the Annual Conference of the Party. The decisions of the Executive Committee were to be taken by a simple majority of the members present and for that purpose eight members were to form the quorum.

1. *The Presidential Speech of N. Dev to the Patna Conference, 1934, wherein he referred to Nehru as 'our beloved friend' and as 'our great leader', N. Dev: Socialism and National Revolution. p. 3, and p. 29. Sampurnanand, on the contrary, holds that Nehru had nothing to do with the establishment of the Party; and that, though he tried to exploit it once or twice but on the whole, his attitude towards it was one of amused contempt. (Sampurnanand: Memories and reflections, p. 72).*

The Annual Conference was the second national organ of the Party and its highest policy-making body. It was to consist of delegates from the provincial parties affiliated to the A.I.C.S.P., the delegates being elected on the basis of one delegate for every twenty members. The Annual Conference was to meet once a year and its decisions, as also the decisions of any special sessions, were binding on all affiliated bodies.¹ The organizational pattern, thus, was not dissimilar to that of the Congress.

The constitution limited the membership of the Party to the members of the Indian National Congress "who are also members of a Provincial Congress Socialist Party, provided that they are not members (a) of any communal organization, or (b) of any other political organization whose objects and programme are in the opinion of the party inconsistent with its own."² This restriction on the membership of the Party, which made Party membership conditional upon the membership of the National Congress is to be noted in view of the claim of the Party to be a Marxian Socialist Party. We shall turn to this aspect of the Party in detail later.

The object of the Party, as set forth in the Platform of the Party adopted by the Conference, was two-fold : (a) 'the achievement of complete independence in the sense of separation from the British Empire' and (b) 'the establishment of a Socialist Society'.³ The meaning of the first objective was further amplified in a separate resolution on the 'Meaning of Complete Independence' which resolved that Complete Independence 'must mean the establishment of an Independent Indian State in which an objective involves refusal to compromise at any stage with British Imperialism'.⁴ Such an amplification was necessitated due to a number of assumptions and calculations that were

1. *All-India Congress Socialist Party, Constitution, Programme and Resolutions of the First Conference of the Party.*
2. *Ibid.*
3. *The Platform of the Party, adopted at the First Conference, Bombay, 1934.*
4. *Report of the First Conference, Resolution,*

uppermost in the minds of the founders. It was necessitated by the fact that the Indian National Congress itself had, at its Lahore Session (1929), adopted a resolution which declared that the Congress stood for the ideal of Purna Swaraj (complete independence). The contention of the C.S.P. leaders was that, despite their adherence to this goal, the Congress had never clearly defined what this Purna Swaraj was to be like. Even the Karachi Congress Fundamental Rights Resolution, which was the first attempt ever made by the Congress in this direction, fell far short of the ideal of social, economic and political freedom which independence of India must mean to the masses; in fact, there was a wide gulf between the preamble and the substance of the Karachi Resolution.¹

This unwillingness on the part of the Congress to define the concept of Swaraj meant two things for the Congress Socialists. It indicated the desire of the Right to establish a capitalist democracy in independent India, their aversion to socialism being a clear pointer to this.² But to the Congress Socialists social and economic freedom of the producing masses meant only one thing—Socialism.³

In this they were supported by Jawaharlal Nehru, who wrote : "If an indigenous government took the place of the foreign government and kept all the vested interests intact, that would not even be the shadow of freedom." The two-fold objects of the C.S.P. closely resembled similar objects that Nehru had propounded in his "Whither India"? He had said : "India's immediate goal can, therefore, only be considered in terms of ending the exploitation of her people, it must mean independence and the severance of British connection, which means imperialist domination; economically and socially it must mean the ending of all special class privilege and vested interests."⁴

1. *Jai Prakash Narain : Why Socialism*, p. 26.

2. *Op. Cit.*, p. 74.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

4. *J. Nehru : Whither India?* p. 16.

Reverting to our argument the Congress Socialists felt that it was because of this vagueness in the Congress policy that the masses of peasants and workers did not actively participate in the national movement, but as such participation, according to these socialists, was *sine qua non* of the success of the movement, it was essential to make clear to the masses in terms quite intelligible to them what Swaraj as conceived by the Congress would mean to them.¹

Their demand for refusal to enter at any stage into negotiations on the constitutional issue with the British Government was based on the assumption that freedom could not be achieved through negotiation and that freedom thus gained would not be a real freedom. This underlying assumption remained throughout the history of the C.S.P.; moreover, it was an assumption which it shared also with the communists and other left groups. The aim of establishing a socialist society in a Swaraj India was supported by the adoption of a programme, the fifteen points of which were regarded as essential before power could pass to the producing classes.

1. Transfer of all power to the producing masses.
2. Development of the economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the state.
3. Socialization of key principal industries (e.g. steel, cotton, jute, railways, shipping, plantations, mines); Insurance and Public Utilities, with a view to the progressive socialization of the instruments of production, distribution and exchange.
4. State monopoly of foreign trade.
5. Organization of cooperative for production, distribution and credit in the unsocialized sector of the economic life.
6. Elimination of princes and landlords and all other classes of exploiters without compensation.
7. Redistribution of land to the peasants.
8. The state to encourage and control cooperative and collective farming.

1. *Report of the First Conference, p. 16.*

9. Liquidation of debts owned by peasants and workers.
10. Recognition of the right to work or maintenance by the State.
11. 'To everyone according to his means' is to be the basis ultimately of distribution of economic goods.
12. Adult franchise which shall be on a functional basis.
13. The State shall neither support nor discriminate between religions nor recognize any distinction based on caste or community.
14. The State shall not discriminate between the sexes.
15. Repudiation of the so-called Public Debt of India.¹

While the objective section of the Programme sought to define the concept of Swaraj, the Plan of Action indicated the immediate lines of work along which the Party was to function. This provided for two separate though not unconnected lines of work : work inside the National Congress and work outside it. The work inside the Congress was to be performed with a view to secure its acceptance of the object and the programme of the Party.²

The work outside the Congress was to be devoted to organising peasants and labour unions and participation in those that were already in existence "for the purpose of developing and participating in the day-to-day economic and political struggle of peasants and workers and intensify the class struggle of the masses and of creating a powerful mass movement of independence and socialism."³

Other fields of activity outside the Congress were the organization of and participation in Youth Leagues, Women's Organization, Volunteer Organization, etc. for the purpose of winning their support for the Programme of the Party.⁴

It also formulated certain immediate demands which were to form the basis on which the immediate activity of

1. *Platform of the Party, adopted at the First Bombay Conference.*
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*

the Party in these various fields was to be undertaken. These immediate demands were broadly divided into two sections, political and economic; the latter being subdivided into demands concerning labour and agrarian demands.

The immediate political demands were to be freedom of speech and of press, freedom of association and combination, repeal of all anti-national and anti-labour laws, reinstatement of all farmers and tenants deprived of their lands owing to their participation in the movement of national independence, release of all political prisoners detained without trial and withdrawal of all orders of externment and internment or restraint on political grounds, free and compulsory primary education and the liquidation of adult illiteracy, drastic reduction by at least 50 per cent of the military expenditure of the Government of India, and regulation and control of religious endowments.

Before formulating the separate economic programme for the workers and peasants, the following general economic demands were made : control and supervision by the state of industries subsidized or otherwise protected; control by state of banking, key industries and ownership of mineral resources, municipalization of public utilities, full state control over exchange and currency, control of usury, direct and indirect, a steeply graduated tax on all incomes, including net income from agriculture above a fixed minimum and graduated death duties.

The immediate demands for labour were : freedom of labour from serfdom and conditions bordering on serfdom; the right to form unions, to strike and picket; compulsory recognition of unions by employer; a living wage; a 40-hour week and healthy quarters and conditions of work; insurance against unemployment, sickness, accident, old age, etc.; one month's leave every year with full pay to all workers and two months' leave with full pay to women workers during maternity; prohibition against employment of children of school-going age in factories, and

women and children under sixteen in underground mining, equal wages for equal work and weekly payment of wages whenever demanded.

The immediate agrarian demands advocated were : elimination of land-lordism in Zamindari and Talukdari areas without compensation; encouragement of cooperative farming; liquidation of debts owned by workers and peasants; liquidation of arrears of rent; complete exemption from rents and taxes of all peasants with uneconomic holdings; reduction of rent and land revenue by at least 50 per cent; abolition of all feudal and semi-feudal levies on the peasantry and penalization of illegal exaction of rent or money decrees of homestead, agricultural resources and that portion of a peasants' holding which is just sufficient to maintain an average peasant family.¹ The office of the Party was first located at Banaras, and it then shifted to Bombay.

Ideology of the C.S.P.

These Platform points indicate something of the general outlook of the C.S.P. founders, but they tell us little of their exact ideology or of their political approach. Independence and socialism are the goals, and for both, the participation of the masses is seen to be necessary: But how did they visualize the relation between the two goals? Was one to precede the other or were they in some way complementary? Moreover, in terms of political tactics, what was to be the attitude to the existing Congress leadership and towards their own membership of the Congress?

It is when we critically look at the C.S.P. for a clarification on all these points that difficulties increasingly arise and we come face to face with confusion not only of aims and ideals but also of the tactics that were sought to be adopted for their realization. Behind the hetero-

1. *Platform of the Party, 1934.*

geneity of the C.S.P. outlook was the heterogeneity of the people who went to constitute it. In fact, what was called the C.S.P. was not a homogeneous group. It was a queer assortment of all sorts of people often poles apart in ideology and outlook. Fabian Socialists, Marxists, Kautskyites, Stalinists, Leninists, Trotskyites, Rosa Luxemburgites and even Gandhites and Vedantists constituted the conglomeration that the C.S.P. was. What united them on a common platform was their uncompromising adherence to nationalism and the goal of national freedom, no less than their opposition to the programme of nationalism advocated by the Indian National Congress and their further claim that they subscribed to socialism no matter how varied their conception of socialism might be. It was the general situation itself rather than any homogeneity of outlook which helped to bring them on a common platform.

For this purpose it is necessary to remember the circumstances in which the C.S.P. was born and the factors which shaped the outlook of the Congress Socialists. A band of left Congressmen, some of whom were old enough to have taken part in both the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921 and the Civil Disobedience Movements of 1930-31, and 1932-33, but most of them young men with experience of only the two Civil Disobedience Movements, came face to face with the failure of the movements and realised that the weaknesses of the Congress lay in its very foundations, both organizational and ideological. This view was shared by all left Congressmen whether they later chose to style themselves as Congress Socialists or preferred to remain inside the Congress as individual left Congressmen. What distinguished the Congress Socialists from the remainder of the Congress left was that they yoked their socialism to the chariot-wheel of their goal of independence and endeavoured to make it the basis of an independent party. Fundamentally, the quest remained the quest for independence. Thus a variety of strands, linking up of nationalism with socialism, and achieved with such a variety of emphasis and undertaking, served to make Congress socialism the complex and heterogeneous phenomenon

that it was. Congress Socialists ranged in their social and political views from people who could not be distinguished from other left Congressmen, to those who held orthodox Marxist views.

This association of nationalism with socialism was a complex process. The yearning for independence had led some Congressmen to study the history of national revolutions in other countries, yet they could not accept these ready made methods simply because, as they thought, organization of violence on such a scale was impracticable in the conditions obtaining in India. While they rejected these methods, yet these studies served two purposes; they ingrained in their minds a faith in revolution and revolutionary methods, that is, methods of direct struggle as opposed to cooperation and constitutionalism; this was further reinforced by their belief that the movement of the type initiated by the Congress could not succeed.

Many factors combined to sustain this faith. The experiences of the Swaraj Party in the Legislature: its failure, coupled with the pronouncements of two of its top leaders, finally led to the discrediting of constitutionalism in the eyes of these young left Congressmen. Among these leaders was Moti Lal Nehru, the leader of the Swaraj Party in the Assembly after the death of C. R. Das. From the Congress platform in 1929 he had declared that his experiences in the legislature had convinced him that Swaraj could not be secured through that channel. The other was a joint statement by V. B. Patel, who had been the President of the Assembly, and Subhas Chandra Bose, from Geneva in 1930 wherein they not only rejected constitutionalism but even went further and asserted that India could not obtain independence through non-violence. Stray utterances though they seem to be, they formed the undertones to the discussions among many Congressmen during early thirties.

Developments in the international field further consolidated their scepticism. They observed what they called 'the crisis of the capitalist democracy in both economic and

political fields. In the economic field the great economic depression (1929-33) and the apparent inability of capitalism to solve the crisis convinced them that capitalism was not a viable method of economic reconstruction as some claimed it to be. In the political field, the rise of Fascism and Nazism and the crumbling down of democratic institutions made them lose their faith in democracy. Moreover, in India there were no democratic institutions and, therefore, there was no question of evolutionism.

It was at this critical and crucial stage that socialism, particularly due to achievements in Soviet Russia as limelighted by the achievements of the Five Year Plan and unaffected by the economic depression, caught their serious attention. Socialism and Soviet Russia became, generally speaking, a haven of all their hopes and aspirations. The issues came to be talked of in dichotomous terms of either Fascism or Socialism. The whole set of ideas was put by Narendra Dev, the foremost of this group of Congress Socialists, in his presidential address to the Gujarat Congress Socialist Conference (1935) : "The Party has come into existence as a result of a group of Congressmen in the course of the struggle. They came under the impact of the Socialist thought of the world. They saw that a crisis had come over democracy in the West and that parliamentary institutions were crumbling down on all sides. They also saw that Fascist menace was growing apace, that capitalism was in a decadent condition and had entered its last stage of imperialism. They saw clearly that the choice before the world now lay between socialism and fascism and that the capitalist democracy seemed to have no future before it. They found the world in the midst of a great crisis which did not seem to end. They found that it was Russia alone which had made substantial advances towards socialism and in the midst of surrounding gloom it was the only hope of the poor, the oppressed and the downtrodden, for whom it was a great inspiration to-day because it was a precursor of a new era for the whole mass of humanity. Having studied the history of revolutions in other countries they came to the conclusion that the programme of

the Congress should be fundamentally altered in order to achieve complete independence.”¹

There emerged another aspect in the leftist politics in India of this period, namely, the endeavour to link the problems and destiny of India with the problems and destiny of the world outside. The introduction of this aspect of internationalism was novel in India and, if we leave aside the communists, it was first introduced largely by Jawaharlal Nehru. Among Congressmen it was he who for the first time since 1927 started criticising the narrow nationalism of the dominant Congress leadership, pointed to the dangers of an isolationist policy, and urged Congressmen not to cut themselves off from the currents of world politics. In his presidential address to the Lahore Congress in 1929 he had given a clear formulation of his policy. In his presidential address to the Lucknow Congress (1935) he put the issue in even sharper tones when he declared that the choice before the world was between Socialism and Fascism. The former left Congressmen, some of whom later became Congress Socialists, only followed him in this respect. The role that this aspect of internationalism played in their conversion to socialism was on the following reasoning : Nationalism so far practised in India had failed in its objective and, therefore, there must be something wrong with it; to remedy it one must turn to such revolutions in other countries; this study and the analysis of the world forces and situations showed that only socialism held the field and, therefore, it must be adopted. Here the march clearly was from nationalism to socialism with the prime motive of making nationalism more effective. But once that summit of socialism was reached the reasoning was reversed the other way about : the analysis of the world forces shows clearly that the choice before the world was between socialism and fascism, socialism was inevitable and, therefore, India must adopt the socialist way.

1. N. Dev : *Socialism and National Revolution*, pp. 74-75.

The two sets of arguments were by no means anti-theoretical and were often employed by the same person or set of persons. Nehru, for example, employed both at times, so did Narendra Dev, J. P. Narain, etc., but there is an element of compulsiveness in the second which has also to be noted, for the subtle implication was that, even if one wished to, there was no other path to follow but the path of socialism. This was indicated by N. Dev in his presidential address at the very first all-India gathering of the Congress Socialists at Patna in 1934 : "Socialism is in the air. We cannot escape it."¹

From this there emerged another phenomenon, namely, the irresistible tendency to identify socialism with Marxism. As Soviet Russia was the Mecca of their hopes and aspirations, Marxian Socialism and Soviet Russia came to be equated. The Soviet was regarded as the practical experiment of the theory of Marxism and though its mistakes were realized, they were regarded as inevitable and excusable.² As Soviet Russia was regarded as the practical pathfinder of the world afflicted by depression and disease, so was Marxism, in realm of theory, thought to be the inevitable key to all social, economic and political revolutions.

There were yet other roads which led to Congress Socialism. The experiences of the left Congressmen who had been working in peasants', workers', students' and youth organizations, served to bring some of them to the socialist fold. We have earlier seen how some Congressmen, with a view to making the Congress movement more

1. N. Dev : *Socialism and National Revolution*, Pres. address to First Session of the All-India Socialist Conference, p. 3.
2. J. P. Narain : *Why Socialism ?* p. 57. Speaking about the Soviet experiment he says : "When with test-tubes mistakes cannot be avoided, much less can they be avoided when you are experimenting with millions of men and one-sixth of the globe." And further : "Let not the Russians' mistakes blind us to their great achievements. to the lessons they are teaching. Let wise parlour philosophers grin over them and shake their sceptic little heads. For us, who are to do things, who have a task before us, it is the great principle of a new life which the Russians are so boldly practising that alone is of value."

effective by bringing it in contact with the masses, had started work in these bodies. Initially, they had not started their work on the basis of any socialist ideology or doctrine, except the desire to agitate among them and organise them for the amelioration of their immediate, burning grievances. They were prompted by an utopian ideal to raise the working people above their existing life. But the experiences of their work, the apathy of the masses etc. led them to search for those methods and ideologies which had prepared the masses for successful revolutions in other countries. It was here that socialism came to their help. But as in the case of many others, socialism came as much for their asking as without it, and in their case, too, socialism came in the wake of the same national and international forces operating upon the scene, and in the cases of many, it came so suddenly that it could not be digested, nor were its full implications realised.

As a result of the activities and propaganda of these new and enthusiastic converts to socialism, socialism became popular and it became a fashion to be socialist. The profession of faith in socialism became the very sign of progressiveness. Thus, the previously quoted assertion of N. Dev that 'Socialism is in the air' was largely a description of this diffusion of socialist ideas and their pervasiveness. In this climate of thought, others were recruited to socialism; some, no doubt, with firm intellectual conviction, but many came out of a desire to join themselves to what seemed to be the current fashion. The atmosphere was somewhat unreal and a socialist worker of to-day looking back to this period has made the comment : "Socialism was in the air not as a distinct creed, programme and organization, much less a way of life, but as a sort of fashion."¹

Recruits to the Congress Socialist Party, though not to Congress socialism itself, came from other directions also. Some of them were those revolutionaries who believed

1. *M. Limaye : Evolution of Socialist Policy, p. 1.*

in violent overthrow of the foreign rule. Withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement led to a recrudescence of their activity. Others were simply attracted by Congress Socialists' talk of socialism and revolution, and that too under perfect legal conditions. Even before 1934 some of them had been successfully converted to Marxism through meeting communists while in prison or in ordinary life. They might even have joined the Communist Party, but this Party was declared illegal in 1934, the very year the C.S.P. was formed; a fact which helped to swell the ranks of the C.S.P.

In the conditions of illegality some communists also joined the C.S.P. Only a handful came in the beginning but they entered in large numbers when the united front tactics were adopted.

The assemblage of all these diverse elements on the platform of the C.S.P. was bound to make it a heterogeneous body, though not a hybrid growth. Their pull in different directions was not only reflected in the ideology and the tactics of the C.S.P. but plagued its very existence for years to come. It is noteworthy that despite these differences there was a rare sense of comradeship among the founding fathers. This had been testified by a number of them. Sampurnanand says : "We were not only fighters for freedom but apostles of a new age, a new orientation of human life, a new mission and the hostility to which we were subjected by most of the old leaders cemented our bonds of comradeship still more firmly."¹

The Founders of the C.S.P.

The diversity of outlook is made clear if we examine the views of the persons who constituted the A.I.C.S.P. Executive Committee elected at the first Bombay Conference. Sampurnanand, who presided at the Bombay Conference, was a leading member of the Party at this time and in 1936 he wrote a book called "Samajvad" (Socialism).

1. *Op. Cit.*, p. 75.

He also cooperated with the other leading members of the Party like N. Dev, J. P. Narayan, Sri Prakash etc. in contributing to *Samyavada Ka Vigula* (The Clarion Call of Socialism). In 1940 he wrote and published *Vyakti aur Raj* (Individual and Society). "Samajvad" abounds in Marxist formulations and throughout the author felt proud to style himself a scientific socialist and a Marxist,¹ though this did not prevent him from dedicating that book to the Absolute.

But, however inconsistent it may be to attempt to combine Marxism with idealism, God and religion, Sampurnanand was only typical of those who saw no difficulty in the enterprise. He, like others of his kind trained in the traditional Indian philosophical thought, was not unaware of the fact that Marxism seemed to conflict with idealism of the traditional Indian philosophy but he thought that the difficulty involved was not insurmountable, either in theory or in practice. In the preface of his book "Samajvad", he says: "I have tried here to show that in places this doctrine comes in conflict with the Indian philosophical thought. To many people, who accept the socialistic programme in general and also accept the Economic Interpretation of History, there seems to be some inadequacy in this theory. It is the duty of these people to see how this aspect of the theory can be strengthened and how far it can be reconciled with idealism. There are many students of philosophy who have been influenced by the Advaitism

1. Cf. for example his analysis of the Marxian Scientific Socialism where he gives reasons for adding the term 'scientific'. "It is necessary to add the adjective 'Scientific.' Many people have started calling themselves socialist simply because to style oneself Socialist is regarded as a sign of progressiveness. There are many in India who don't like the Russian Communist Party or the Indian Congress Socialist Party but still call themselves Socialist." (Translated from Hindi, see Sampurnanand Samajvada, p. 67). Again on page 69 of the same book he writes: "The importance of the theory of Marx and Engels is proved by the fact that to-day by Socialists is meant only those who are their followers, all others have to add an adjective of some kind or other." He also gives his preference for Marxian Socialism as the best type of Socialism.

of Shankar. I am one of them and think that Dialectical Materialism and the Economic Interpretation of History are not inherently in conflict with Advaitism."¹ This search for reconciliation took many forms and in course of years, as was to be expected, it ended in complete abandonment of Marxism and even of Socialism.

The view that Marxism, Communism and Socialism (and they were all indiscriminately regarded as identical at this stage) were not irreconcilable with the philosophical and the cultural traditions of India was shared by various sorts of persons including even many non-Socialist and Rightist Congressmen. It would appear, however, that the Rightists took the view for the purpose of disarming the socialists by pointing out that the ideals for which Marxism and Socialism of the West stood were nothing new and that they were preached by the Indian thinkers of the by-gone ages. The same thing was said of the relationship of Gandhism to Marxism when it was pointed out that Gandhism stood for the same egalitarian social and economic order for which Marxism stood and that it was merely Marxism minus violence. However, this sort of reasoning had an effect contrary to that intended, for it carried the implication that Marxism was good, as good as Gandhism, only the means adopted by the Marxists were bad. This, in a way, carried propaganda in favour of Socialism and Marxism, for in the minds of many this argument over means was bound to be obliterated and Marxism came to be consciously supported.²

To return to Sampurnanand, because he persisted in this belief he even criticised ethics, morality, God and religion, and state and law, for the role that they were playing

1. See his *Samajvad*, translated from Hindi.
2. This was realised long after by the Rightists when the growing strength of the communists in post-independent India alarmed them and in a recently published book *Gandhi and Marx* by K. G. Mashruwala there is a complete repudiation of this stand and Gandhism and Marxism are presented as two anti-thetical doctrines.

in the existing society as the handmaid of the possessing class. In this he brings the usual Marxian catch-phrases to describe their role.¹ Indeed in his writings we find one of those few occasions when a few Congress Socialists criticised the class-character of morality, God and religion. This we shall deal with more extensively when we come to consider the Marxism of the C.S.P.

Thus he tried to be true to both Historical Materialism and Spiritualism by showing that though the ultimate reality was the Brahman of the Vedant, which was the ultimate cause of this world, yet in this material world the Dialectical processes described by Marx are in operation. Thus speaking about Marx and Engels he says : "To me their law of development seems to be quite right. I do not hold that matter is the ultimate reality of this world or that consciousness is a derivative of matter. I am a believer in Shanker's Advaita according to which Truth-Consciousness-Bliss-Brahman is the ultimate reality. This world is the appearance of Brahman. But in this world of appearance development takes place in the way described by them (that is, Marx and Engels) This is also true about the Economic Interpretation of History. One who regards human consciousness as eternal will also admit that along with the economic factors, the independent laws of consciousness also work".²

Thus, by positing a conscious being he could, however incongruous it would appear to be, performed the miracle of reconciling the two views and could show that alongside of the economic factors, thought and ideas play a great part in history. It enabled him to accept a socialistic programme without necessarily binding himself to materialistic metaphysics. It provided that philosophical basis of socialism after which he was hankering.

Yusuf Meherally, born in 1903, son of a prosperous businessman and brought up in an aristocratic way, was a

1. *His Samajvada*, pp. 11-13.

2. *See his Vyatoti aur Raj*, p. 65.

substitute member of the Executive. He had become famous in connection with demonstrations relating to the Simon Commission and was one of those Congress Socialists who were radical and revolutionary more in the political than in the social sense. Influenced more by the writings of Mazzini and Garibaldi and by the Sinn Fein Movement of Ireland and the Chinese and Russian revolutions, he was in favour of adoption of more revolutionary methods by the nationalist movement. His idea of energizing the nationalist movement by associating it with the youth of the country found concrete expression in the birth of the Bombay Provincial Youth League in 1928, which was very prominent in the demonstrations against the Simon Commission and in the Civil Disobedience Movements. His launching of the National Militia was done with the same purpose.

Mrs. Kamla Debi Chattopadhyaya, educated at Bedford College, London, is a literary figure and a social worker. She took a prominent part in the Civil Disobedience Movement. She presided over the Second C.S.P. Conference at Meerut in 1936 and had been one of the most consistent of Congress Socialists. She also carried her radicalism with the All-India Women's Conference, which she characterized as being controlled by the bourgeoisie. She was always in favour of taking part in constructive activity.

Jai Prakash Narain, for many years the General Secretary of the Party and its most popular leader, was a Marxist at this stage. There was the stamp of Marxism on all that he wrote and spoke during this period, the climax being his "Why Socialism". Born of a poor peasant family in Behar, he was, by the conditions of his birth and the early experiences of life, well suited for the reception of Marxism under the influence of which he came during his student days in U.S.A., where he had to work his way through the University. When he returned to India in 1929, both Gandhi and Nehru developed a fancy for him. In 1930 Nehru made him the President of the Labour Research Department of the Congress. He was a critic of Gandhism,

though he was one of those few of the Congress Socialist leaders whom Gandhi regarded as being near to him. His wife, a product of Gandhi ashram at Sabarmati, was a thorough-going Gandhite, and a link between the two.

Narendra Dev, another great luminary of the Party and its patriarch, was also among those who professed faith in Marxism. But he was not as orthodox as J. P. Narain, and was, indeed, a non-doctrinaire. In politics he was first a follower of Tilak but later other revolutionary traditions influenced his outlook. He had rather Kautskyite tendencies. Rosa Luxemburg's humanist outlook also influenced him. In a country like India, he thought, the work of revolution could be carried more by the peasantry. He was not, like the orthodox Marxists, opposed to Gandhi's constructive activity but thought it inadequate. He appreciated the role of the middle class intellectuals in the development of socialist thought and movement but also valued peaceful class struggle. Marxian Dialectics and the materialistic interpretation of history influenced him, but his faith was not that of a blind devotee. He valued them as Bernstein would have valued them. He was also not prepared to identify Marxism with Soviet Communism.

Dr. Rammanohar Lohia was born of a Marwari family. His father was a Congressite and it was from him that Lohia first got his introduction to the nationalist movement. He took his doctorate in Political Economy from the Berlin University. While in Europe he had come in contact with Dr. Schumacher, Brailsford and other Social Democratic leaders. He had also seen with his own eyes the rise of Hitler, and developed a strong aversion for violence. This provides the background to his ideology. By temperament and outlook he was social democratic from the very beginning. He was neither pro-communist nor pro-Marxist. He founded the 'Congress Socialist', first published from Calcutta, which later became the official organ of the Congress Socialist Party, and was then published from Bombay. He is an individualistic thinker and has not bound

himself to any fixed doctrine. He was one of those Congress Socialists who were devoted to Gandhi and his technique of struggle, but at the same time he was opposed to the Right wing of the Congress and its policies. He was not a stable member of the Party, being unwilling to confine himself to party discipline or party ideology.¹

Achyut Patwardhan, also a prominent Congress Socialist, was born of a rich nationalist-minded family. He was more a Gandhite than a Socialist and preferred unostentatious work to high-power-politics. Had circumstances been such as to force a choice upon him he would have given up socialism rather than nationalism and further, if any such occasion had arisen he would have thrown the Congress Socialist Party itself into cold storage rather than split the National Congress. Like Meherally he was more a radical in politics. While a student at the Benares Hindu University he had been greatly influenced by theosophy and being a Gandhite in temperament and outlook, he was ethical-minded and stood for spiritualisation of social and political conduct.

M. R. Masani, for some time the General Secretary of the Party and its President at the Lahore Annual Conference (1938), was an influential member of the Party. As a student in London his outlook had been influenced by the Fabians and other theoreticians of the British Labour Party. He visited Soviet Russia in 1927 and came back exhilarated and full of enthusiastic admiration for Soviet Russia.² After this visit he became disillusioned with the Social Democracy of the West. He writes : "The story of Social Democracy in leading states like England, France and Germany is pretty well known. It is a story

1. For a brief account of the lives of Y. Meherally, Narendra Dev, J. P. Narain, Kamala Debi, R. M. Lohia, A. Patwardhan, A. Mehta, see G. S. Bhargava: *Leaders of the Left. An account of the lives of Narain and Dev is to be found in Introduction by Y. Meherally in J. P. Narain: Towards Struggle and N. Dev: Socialism and National Revolution, respectively. A good biography of the life of Narain is in Hindi by Rambriksh Benipuri. And for the shortest possible account see the Hindusthan Year Book (Current).*
2. *His, Socialism Reconsidered, p. 12.*

of weakness, of lack of leadership and of an absence of confidence in the very creed professed. Under the cover of the slogan of the inevitability of gradualness the social democratic leaders refused to move towards Socialism at all.”¹ Speaking of this change he writes : “Many of us have at one time or another in our lives turned with some hope from the barren record of the Social Democrats to the communists.”² He visited Russia for the second time in 1935, from which visit, however, he returned with some doubts and fears but in his own words “kept them to myself, hoping things would right themselves before long and publicly continued to praise Soviet achievement.”³ In this phase of his thought he displayed some Trotskyite tendencies. He was later opposed to the dominant Marxist group of Narain and was against the policy of cooperation with the communists on which ground he resigned in 1939. He reconsidered socialism in 1944 and lost faith in it.

Asoka Mehta, though not a member of the first Executive because he was still in prison, had taken part with others, while in Nasik Prison, in drawing up the blue-print of the Party, and had been a very influential member of the Party. He was for years editor of the Party journal, the “Congress Socialist”. He was among those whose appreciation of socialism had developed largely on empirical grounds. He also was opposed to the Marxian orthodoxy of Narain.

A more or less similar pattern of heterogeneity in temperament and outlook is discernible if we take into consideration other members of the Party; whether they were members of the Executive, or were, in one way or another influential in the Party. The complexity of ideas further increases if we take into consideration all those who joined the Party later. Thus among the members of the Party who at some time or other adorned it were the following : Nabakrishna Choudhary, later Chief

1. *Op. Cit.*, p. 32.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

3. *Op. Cit.*, p. 16.

Minister of Orissa, the late Harihar Nath Sastri who became the President of the Indian National Trade Union Congress from its very foundation, E. M. S. Namboodripad who later became the Chief Minister of Kerala, and P. Ramamurthi (both later became members of the Politbureau of the Communist Party of India), N. G. Ranga, the peasant leader, etc.

Another factor to be kept in view is that almost all of these Congress Socialists were middle class intellectuals, the proletarian and even peasant elements being almost negligible. Narendra Dev truly characterised himself and his colleagues when he observed at the very first gathering of the Congress Socialists that the social foundation of this new school of thought which had appeared within the Congress was the democratic intelligentsia. "Most of us", he said, "are only intellectual socialists".¹ The Party thus was predominantly middle class in composition. In the beginning its influence in the trade unions was almost negligible and it did not draw its membership from the trade unions, the only trade unionists in the Party being Sibnath Banerjee and Harihar Nath Sastri. The members of the Party were not even predominantly Kisan (peasant), although the number of Kisan workers was pretty large and many of its leaders were associated with Kisan organizations that were shooting up in large numbers in the country.

Policies and tactics of the C.S.P.

Equipped with this knowledge of the elements that initially constituted the C.S.P. let us now turn to a detailed study of its policies and tactics. The Plan of Action, referred to above, declared that the Party was to "work within the Indian National Congress, with a view to securing its acceptance of the objects and programme of the Party."² This aim to make the Congress an instrument of the policy of the C.S.P. was a line of thought inside the Party, which existed since its formation, but in a vague and nebulous form, with no tactical line prescribed. In his

1. N. Dev: *Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 23.

2. *The Platform of the Party, the First Bombay Conference Report.*

presidential address to the First Session of the All-India Socialist Conference, N. Dev spoke of "our endeavour to influence the Nationalist Movement in the direction of socialism."¹ He further said : "The Congress to-day may accept socialist programme only in a mutilated form but the whole drive of the nation will be in that direction, because the responsibility for carrying on the struggle for national independence is more and more devolving upon the masses."²

Such an attitude was also implied in the quarrel over socialism with the Congress Right. It was also a distinctive feature at the First All-India gathering of the Congress Socialists at Patna where even the resolution on Council Entry spoke of the "necessity of a programme which was socialist in action and objective"³ and where the main resolution, sought to be moved at the A.I.C.C. by the Congress Socialists, urged the Congress to adopt a programme of this kind. It was this project to commit the Congress to a socialist programme which alarmed the Congress Right and led to that wordy duel starting with the resolution of the Working Committee of the Congress, to which we referred earlier. There is no doubt that this incident led to a series of confabulations between the top leaders of the C.S.P., with the result that though the plan of action adopted at Bombay still spoke of the need to persuade the Congress to adopt both the objectives, yet nothing more was done about the methods by which this would be achieved.

At this stage a doubt was raised whether Congress could be a fit instrument of social change⁴ and gradually, therefore, this line of work was given up and from 1935 onwards the dominant tendency became to make the Congress a requisite instrument only of the anti-imperialist struggle.

1. N. Dev : *Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 3.

2. N. Dev : *Address to Patna Conference*, p. 8.

3. *Indian Annual Register*, 1934, p. 341.

4. M. Limaye : *Evolution of Socialist Policy*, p. 21.

In this tactic a distinction was made between the two goals of independence and socialism and the view was taken that the task of the Congress was only to lead a successful struggle for freedom. Therefore, the main task of the Congress Socialists was considered to be the organizational and ideological reorientation of the Congress so as to make it the most uncompromising, united, anti-imperialistic front of the people. Consistent with this, the propagation and fight for socialism was left to be carried on from the platform of the party and it was agreed that on the Congress platform only the anti-imperialistic struggle was to be waged.

Thus as early as September, 1935, Jai Prakash Narain, while giving his presidential address to the Bengal C.S.P., observed that "the first and the main task of the party is to develop the anti-imperialist movement."¹ He went on to say : "Our work within the Congress is governed by the policy of developing it into a true anti-imperialist body. It is not our purpose, as sometimes it has been misunderstood to be, to convert the whole Congress into a full-fledged socialist party. All we seek to do is to change the content and policy of that organization so that it comes truly to represent the masses, having the object of emancipating them both from the foreign power and the native system of exploitation."² Continuing in the same spirit the Meerut Thesis of the Party declared that the party should take only an anti-imperialist stand on the Congress platform and that it should not place a full socialist programme before the Congress.³

Indeed, it differentiated between the immediate and ultimate tasks of the party and maintained that the "immediate task" was to develop the national movement into a real anti-imperialistic movement.⁴ The Thesis further

1. J. P. Narain : *Towards Struggle*, p. 130.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Meerut Thesis adopted at the Second Conference of the C.S.P., January, 1936*

4. *Meerut Thesis.*

decided to evolve for this purpose an anti-imperialist programme suiting the needs of workers, peasants and the lower middle class.

In July 1936, Masani who belonged to the C.S.P. Right, while presiding over the Sindh Congress Socialist Congress, went even further in declaring that "it was misleading to give the impression that the Congress was divided to-day on the question of what form of social order was to follow the establishment of independence. Socialists certainly desire the establishment of socialism after independence and for this purpose they would utilize platform of the party to propagare such ideas. But they did not seek to commit the Congress to any decision at this stage."¹ He was most unequivocal in saying : "The issue on which the country and the Congress were divided to-day was not the issue of socialism but the issue of independence and the ways and means of achieving it. If there was a division in the Congress to-day, it was not between the socialists and nationalists but between two groups of nationalists."²

In the Faizpur Thesis of the Party adopted at the third conference of the C.S.P. in the winter of 1936, there was a section on the United National Front Against Imperialism which also declared that "the chief task facing us and all other anti-imperialists is the creation of a powerful National Front against Imperialism."³

In pursuance of this policy, the party divided its activity into three parts : work inside the Congress, work among the masses outside the Congress, and the integration of both these activities as their aim. The work outside the Congress was to be conducted among the peasants, workers, intelligentsia, youth, students, women, etc. with a view to enlisting their organised support for the independence movement. It was in keeping with this that the first Bombay conference of the Party had propounded a comprehensive immediate social, economic and political

1. *Indian Annual Register*, Vol. II, p. 309.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Faizpur Thesis*.

demands for the peasants, labour etc., on the basis of which they were to be organised.¹

The Faizpur Thesis of the Party put the whole policy question in clear terms: "The anti-imperialist struggle can't be separated from the day-to-day struggle of the masses. The development of the latter is the basis for a successful fight against imperialism. Therefore, our foremost task outside the Congress is to develop independent organizations of the peasants, workers and of other exploited sections of the people."²

But these organizations, while functioning independently and carrying on their own programme, were to be organizationally linked up with the Congress by the method of collective affiliation.³

The work inside the Congress, firstly, was connected with its reorganization. The organizational and constitutional set up of the Congress was held to be to a great extent responsible for its non-radical character. The Congress was organised on the basis of individual paid membership and most of its members came from the peasantry and the middle class, but they were mainly inactive members. Their activity was normally confined to electing delegates and representatives once a year. In fact, between the Congress organizations and most of its members there was a more or less the same relationship that exists between a party and the broad electorate in a democratic country. Its members, moreover, had no day-to-day contact with the masses or their grievances. To vitalize the Congress, therefore, it was essential to make thorough-going changes in its constitution. For this reason, therefore, the C.S.P. at the very first Bombay Session suggested a number of amendments to the Congress Constitution which could, in its opinion, change the organizational face of the Congress. These included such changes as the amplification

1. *This Chapter, beginning.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *In the next Chapter we shall discuss what practical steps were taken by the C.S.P. in collaboration with other leftists to bring this about, though it did not succeed in this.*

of the word independence to mean "the establishment of an independent state in which power is transferred to the producing masses."¹ The object of the Congress was further to include "refusal to compromise at any stage with British Imperialism."² The article requiring Congressmen to be habitual wearers of hand-spun Khaddar was to be deleted, and so was the article on yarn franchise and four-anna membership. The functional principle of membership was suggested and for the basis of election, the members of the District Congress Committees were to form electoral colleges.³ As Narain put it, the Congress "should be given a sort of a Soviet Constitution from the bottom upwards. A District Congress Committee ought to represent the peasant unions, the labour unions and other functional organizations of the anti-imperialist classes in that district."⁴

But did this transformation of the Congress into a mass anti-imperialist body necessarily involve the change of leadership of the Congress? In the beginning the Party gave the impression that it did. The activities and utterances of many of its leaders, and some early theses of the Party themselves clearly indicated that they wanted, then and there, to replace the bourgeois leadership of the Congress by the leadership of revolutionary socialism. Thus the Meerut Thesis of the Party, while speaking of the immediate necessity of developing the national movement into a real anti-imperialist movement, said: "It is necessary to wean the anti-imperialist elements in the Congress away from its present bourgeois leadership and to bring them under the leadership of revolutionary socialism."⁵

In pursuance of this policy the C.S.P. leaders attacked the Congress leadership in much the same vein in which the communists had been doing with regard to the Congress

1. *Report of the first C.S.P. conference, Bombay, Amendments to Congress Constitution.*
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *J. P. Narain: Why Socialism, p. 155.*
5. *Meerut Thesis (1936).*

organization as a whole. But the Congress Socialists did not attack the Congress organization as such, because to them, in spite of its leadership and programme, it was the only national organization of the Indian people. This is not to say that there was not some lack of clarity regarding the characterisation of the National Congress. To take only two examples, while Narendra Dev, a top ranking leader of the Party, maintained that the "National Congress is not a mass organization but an organization of the petty bourgeoisie (lower middle class)",¹ the Faizpur Thesis of the Party characterised the Congress as a mass organization under the dominance of bourgeois leadership.²

But regarding the characterisation of the leadership of the Congress and its role, there was no doubt in the minds of the top leaders of the C.S.P. Thus the Faizpur Thesis said : "This leadership is unable to develop within the frame-work of its conception and interests the struggle of the mass to a higher level."³ But the same thesis also made it clear that this characterisation of the Right did not mean that the class composition of the Right was itself bourgeois. A part of it was undoubtedly so, but on the whole it was petty-bourgeois under the dominance of the bourgeois interests and subject to the limitations of the Indian bourgeoisie.⁴

It was this analysis of the character of the Congress leadership which defined the task of the Party within that organization, and which was embodied in the Meerut Thesis. This task was further elucidated in the Faizpur Thesis which said that the task within the Congress was not only to "wean away the anti-imperialist elements from the bourgeois leadership but so to develop and broaden the Congress as to transform it into a powerful anti-imperialist front."⁵ It envisaged a complete rebuilding of the Congress starting from the bottom and working upwards.

1. *N. Dev in Samyavada .Ka Bigula, p. 23.*

2. *The Faizpur Thesis.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

It was while elucidating this process of rebuilding of the Congress organization that the character and role of the leadership of the revolutionary socialism in the national movement was amplified. For this an analysis of the class-composition of the nationalist movement was made, and although it was admitted that the nationalist movement in India, as in other countries, was to be a multi-class movement, the bourgeoisie was not only to be denied leadership of the movement but it was even denied any place in it at all. The nationalist movement in India, it was argued, was to be multi-class movement consisting of the workers, peasants and other petty-bourgeois elements (the lower middle class and the intelligentsia).

But the role of all the constituents of the multi-class nationalist movement was not considered equally revolutionary. It was, therefore, thought that the leaderships of this movement must devolve upon the proletariat. The Faizpur Thesis said : "The anti-imperialist struggle in India is a multi-class struggle of the peasantry, working class and the middle class. The working class in India, though organizationally weak and politically not sufficiently conscious of its role, is none the less potentially the most revolutionary class. But the struggle of the Indian masses for freedom will not reach its objective unless the working class is in the vanguard of that struggle. Therefore, it is our task as socialists to see that it assumes a historic role in the national movement. The leadership of revolutionary socialism means nothing else."¹

In the writings and utterances during this period of the two top-ranking leaders of the Party, J. P. Narain and Narendra Dev, we get a further elucidation of this policy. This policy involved direct and immediate challenge to the Right leadership, who, therefore, immediately retaliated in kind. One thought in the Rightist attack against this policy was that they (i.e. Socialists), by this policy were endangering national unity so essential at the moment. The issue is joined by Narain in Chapter IV of his book

1. *Faizpur Thesis.*

"Why Socialism", where he discusses the tactics of the anti-imperialist movement and their relation to socialism and the Party, and he begins with an analysis of Nation and National unity and in the course of this analysis gradually develops the tactics essential to this policy. Drawing upon Marxism and referring to the growth of nationalism in other countries, as also in India since 1857, he showed that "a nation does not in reality mean the whole nation," that nationalism did not comprise the interests of all the classes and groups within it, that in different times different classes constituted the 'Nation' and gave expression to nationalism, and that it depended upon the circumstances of history and the structure of society as to what particular class or group would play the role of leader in it. He showed how the Indian nation was made up of princes, industrialists, bankers, merchants, peasants, labourers, etc., how nationalism did not mean the same thing to all these classes, how the freedom of one of them was not the same as the freedom of the other, nor was the manner in which they would fight for freedom the same for all. Then he took up an analysis of the position of these different classes and evaluated their role in the nationalist movement. The princes depended for their existence upon imperialism and were opposed to the nationalist movement, because basically it stood in opposition to imperialism. The landlords, largely the creation of imperialism, could not take an uncompromising stand in the movement. The bigger landlords had always been solidly behind imperialism and those landlords who joined the movement were not at all interested in "opposing or even agitating against imperialism." Their sole interest lay either with their ambition to occupy posts in the higher services or to ensure that, in the event of any concession being made by imperialism and more power being given to Indians, their interests would not suffer in the process.¹

What about the bourgeoisie? It could be argued that, as in the Western countries the bourgeoisie was the natural

1. *Ibid*, p. 132.

leader of the nationalist movement. Narain observed that it could not perform this role in India. The bourgeoisie even in the Western countries was no longer a revolutionary class. Once it had triumphed over feudalism, it had withdrawn from the revolutionary course. The special limitations of the Indian bourgeoisie, moreover, made it all the more important in the national movement. Firstly, the Indian industrial class had grown up under the aegis of imperialism and was completely at its mercy, economically and politically; therefore, it was unable to oppose imperialism. Secondly, it could be satisfied with facilities for economic development and, thirdly, it would support nationalism only when the latter aimed at placing it in power.¹

The position of the peasants and workers, on the contrary, was different, National freedom means only one thing to peasants, that is, freedom from exploitation, whether foreign or native. As a method of struggle, the peasants had always known only one method—that of direct action. Such action, however, was as dangerous for the foreign oppressor as for the native and it was in the latter's interest that the peasants did not become conscious of their political and economic destiny. Likewise, for the workers freedom meant freedom from wage-slavery by social ownership of means of production and, like peasants, they knew only direct action.

On the above analysis, Narain showed how there was no such thing as national unity which the socialists were trying to destroy. Any talk of united front with the bourgeoisie was futile but this was, in fact, what the Right leadership was preaching. The servile role of the Indian bourgeoisie made any united front of the masses with it absolutely out of question. The alternative basis of the national movement that arose from this analysis was one of Indian masses minus the bourgeoisie and it was necessary if this was to be created the demands of

1. *Ibid*, p. 133.

freedom from exploitation must be placed in the forefront.¹ The first requirement for the development of this front was the building up of class-organizations of the masses, particularly of peasant and labour unions. These unions would organise their struggle against oppression and exploitation, and through that struggle develop in themselves that anti-imperialist consciousness and solidarity which would lead them finally to defeat imperialism.² For this it was essential that their organizations should not aim merely at wringing concessions from the exploiting classes. They must not aim at adjustment with exploitation and oppression but at complete freedom from them; they must be revolutionary and not reformist.

But along side these class-organizations of the masses, there must also be developed a common political organization which would permit them to carry on the anti-imperialist struggle.³ The class organization would enable the workers and peasants, etc. to develop their economic and political struggles separately, but there was also the need of an organization to integrate their activity. But it may be argued, was not the Congress such an organization? The answer was both 'yes' and 'no'. The Congress in its existing form was certainly not such an organization.⁴ Neither its constitution nor its programme answered the requirements of such an organization. But it could be made such an organization because, objectively speaking, it represented the national sentiment of the Indian masses, and there were large petty-bourgeois elements in it that were objectively anti-imperialist.

What, then, must the Congress do to become such an organization of the masses? It must declare that it did not represent the bourgeoisie and that it stood as much against them as against imperialism.⁵ It must declare unequivocally that it was representative of only those classes in

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 151.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

India which were uncompromisingly anti-imperialist. It was, therefore, essential that the Congress should not, as at the moment, be silent or reticent in denouncing the native system of exploitation on the plea of preserving national unity. "Those who wish to develop an anti-imperialist consciousness among the masses must make up their minds about the native system of exploitation—the junior imperialism. They will fail in their purpose, as they have done so far, if they advocate the retention of the latter and the elimination of the former."¹ And, therefore, the Congress must list among its objectives such items as complete independence; transfer of all political and economic power to the producing masses; nationalisation of all key and large industries, banks, mines, plantations, etc; abolition of landlordism in all its forms; land to the tiller of the soil; liquidation of all debts owned by peasants and workers. These were to form the minimum common demands of the masses on which basis their struggle was to be led. It was in the course of these struggles that anti-imperialist consciousness would dawn upon the masses. Theoretically, and by a mere propaganda, it was difficult to impress upon the masses the connection between native vested interests and imperialism. Experience had shown that it was difficult to drive home to the masses how an economic agitation which was naturally aimed immediately against indigenous vested interests could become a force against imperialism.² But it was in course of their struggle that they would come to realise that the system of economic exploitation which was grinding them to poverty was an integral part of imperialism and that a fight against it meant a fight against imperialism itself.

It is to be noted that the processes envisaged in this transformation of the Congress involved not merely a "conversion but a disruption also."³ Narain was more explicit on this point in his address to the Bengal C.S.P. Conference (1935). Developing the thesis he said : "I am not saying

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 151.

2. See J. P. Narain : "*Towards Struggle*," p. 138.

3. *Ibid.*

that by working in this manner we shall win the Right wing to our programme and thus 'convert' the Congress. The Congress, as it is constituted at present, can't hold together very long. The more successful we are in pushing our programme, the nearer the day when a split will occur in it."¹

These tactics were clear. The Congress that was to emerge after this transformation would be a new Congress, both organizationally and ideologically. Indeed, it would inevitably and automatically have led to the ousting of the Right leadership not only from its dominant position but from the Congress altogether, whether this was the deliberate aim (as in the beginning) or not (as later on). It was a reflection of the conception of the Peoples' Party which Roy advocated in the twenties and was advocating in a modified form even then. In effect it also amounted to accepting the thesis that the communists had been advocating at this stage, namely, that the disruption of the Congress was the *sine qua non* of the success of the nationalist movement.² Where the Congress Socialists seemed to differ from the communists was that they did not attack the organization as such but only its programme, its Right leadership and its organizational defects. It followed from this that they also differed in their view that the act of 'disruption' should proceed *pari passu* with reorganization of the Congress, designed to make it a more effective body.

But it has also to be noted that in this attempt to make the Congress a truly anti-imperialist body there was simultaneously and side by side with this policy and technique, an altogether different tactical line. In this no mention of socialism, class-war, class-differentiation, change of leadership, etc, was made. The line of argument was one which might be used by any Congressman, the line that the Congress was not following the path of its own resolutions. In this, references were made in particular to the Complete Independence Resolution of the Lahore Congress

1. J. P. Narain: *Towards Struggle*, p. 131.

2. For a discussion of the Communist view see next Chapter.

and the Fundamental Rights Resolutions of the Karachi Congress.¹ This is not to say that the ideals enunciated in these two important Resolutions were regarded as adequate.² But it was felt that even if these two Resolutions did not go far enough their importance lay in the fact that they laid a basis of certain ideals whose very implications necessitated not only the formulation of certain other ideals but also a change in the Congress regarding both programme and organization.

The Karachi Congress resolution in particular said that its aim was not only the political emancipation of the Indian people but also their social and economic emancipation and it would be remembered that it was felt essential in achieving the latter aim to make revolutionary changes in the existing economic and social structure of society and to remove the gross inequalities. But Narain said that the Congress, after talking of "revolutionary changes, buries its head in sand."³

Here the bone of contention with the Congress lay in the meaning that was attached to the expression economic freedom. It was argued that economic freedom could not be secured merely by passing the puny measures that the Karachi Resolution rather fearfully enumerated.⁴ If all that the Congress understood by economic freedom was death-duties and national ownership of key industries, it would be a very fine freedom that it would confer on the people.⁵

It was here that the minimum economic programme that had been formulated on socialistic reasoning was sometimes presented without any reference to socialism itself. Economic freedom, it was argued, could only mean political and economic power to the producing masses. It was never concealed that to them as socialists, economic

1. We referred to both of these in Chap. *Transition to Congress Socialism*.

2. We have referred to this also.

3. J. P. Narain: *Why Socialism*, p. 25.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

freedom meant only one thing—socialism and nothing else. But it was also asserted that what they were asking the Congress to adopt was not a socialistic programme but that minimum economic programme common to all anti-imperialist elements which, when put into practice, would offer political and economic power to the producing masses and on which basis these elements could be brought into the Congress so as to make it a really mass organization without which it could not succeed.

This line of argument was more frequently used to counter the protests of Right leadership against preaching socialism and against the charge of dividing the nation on the issue. In reply they could say that in formulating this anti-imperialist programme and in adopting the line they were following they had never used the term socialism. Thus, Narendra Dev, speaking at the Gujarat Socialist Conference, said : "Our resolutions which have been discussed in the Congress are not of a socialist character Even the so-called 'socialist' resolution did not speak of socialism but sought to define what Swaraj would mean for the masses."¹ It was essential for the Congress to make clear its picture of Swaraj. "Let us win Swaraj first" tactics which the Right Wing was following were wrong. Congress could not shut its eyes to ultimate ideals. These ultimate ideals were, of course, the ideals of socialism, and on this question of ultimate ideals, they, in spite of this tactical line, were not prepared to surrender to the Right. "The question at bottom", said Narain, "is one of the values and ultimate objectives, which once determined, the rest becomes a matter of logical sequence. If the ultimate objective is to make them prosperous and happy, to free them from all manners of exploitation, to give them unfettered opportunity for development, then, socialism becomes a goal to which one must irresistibly be drawn."²

It was in this vein that Jai Prakash Narain, the General Secretary of the Party, issued the following circular to

1. N. Dev : *Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 73.

2. Narain, *Ibid*, p. 21.

the Party workers early in 1935 : "Nothing should be done which may antagonise the genuinely nationalist elements and drive them to join hands with the compromise-seeking Right-wing. Nothing can be worse than adopting such tactics as may divide the Congress into two hostile camps : socialists and non-socialists. We should, on the contrary, try to take the militant nationalists with us and divide the Congress into the latter and compromising moderates. I wish further to emphasize that we should on no account isolate ourselves from the Congress."

But what, one may ask, was the need for socialism or for talk about socialism in this immediate task of developing and perfecting the national movement? Could not this be done without any reference to socialism or without any so-called socialistic programme as the Party leaders themselves used to say? It was when faced with this abandonment of socialism in the nationalist movement that some of the Party leaders, specially the Marxists among them, amplified what according to them was to be the connection between socialism and national revolution.

In the Faizpur thesis of the Party there was a special section on "National Independence and Socialism" which read : "In view of the fact that considerable confusion exists in the country on the question of the realisation of the struggle for National Independence and Socialism, this Conference declares that though the immediate objective of the mass struggle in India is the achievement of complete National Independence and the capture of power by the masses, the servile role of the Indian big business, the chronic crisis of capitalism all over the world, the increasing pauperisation of the people and the role that the workers, peasants, and middle classes must for these reasons play in the struggle for national emancipation are bound to give the national revolution a socialist orientation.

"It is the opinion of this conference, therefore, that any attempt to drive a hard and fast demarcation between the national and socialistic revolutions in India was wrong in principle and misleading and that the spread of socialist

consciousness and organization among the masses not only does not weaken the movement for genuine national independence but strengthen it and is, therefore, one of the basis tasks of our Party.”¹

Socialist leaders were indeed so convinced of the fact that socialism was the only goal, that to them it was unthinkable how it could not play a directing role even in the national movement. They were even of the opinion that such a movement could not succeed without it. What they thought about it was better expressed by Narendra Dev : “I personally agree that the Congress is not a platform for socialism and its main task is to develop the anti-imperialist struggle. But we should not forget that under present conditions such a struggle can only develop if we succeed in linking it up with the economic demands of the masses and this object can only be achieved if there is a party within the Congress that persistently agitates for the acceptance of the economic programme. It also holds that there is an urgent necessity for carrying on an incessant propaganda for socialism among the Congress workers, for, the more we succeed in this direction, the better are the chances for the acceptance by the Congress of an effective programme of anti-imperialist struggle.”²

Sometimes it was also argued that the study of socialism helped in understanding the laws of history and of historical growth which understanding was quite necessary for the healthy and effective development of the national movement.³ For it was felt that the Congress was under the influence of vested interests and a clarification of issues was necessary.

Indeed for the Marxists among them the line of action was abundantly clear. The task of transformation and rebuilding of the Congress envisaged processes which, as we have already shown, would have led to the ousting of the Right leadership and could have

1. *Faizpur Thesis.*

2. *N. Dev : Socialism and National Revolution, p. 77.*

3. *Lohia : Address to the first session of the Bihar C.S.P., 1936, p. 9.*

made the Congress a mass anti-imperialist movement under the leadership of revolutionary elements and under the circumstances, they would have led the whole national movement towards a social revolution. In this tactic there was to be no demarcation between the national and social revolution and the one was to merge into the other. It was what they called a Leninist stand.

The Answer of the Congress Socialists to the charges by the Left and the Right

The Congress Socialists had their critics both from the Left and the Right and the top ranking leaders of the Party took pains to answer them. The literature that was produced on the subject formed the most vigorous that the Party ever had.

Answer to the Left :— The Leftist critics of the C.S.P. included the Communists and the Royists, who, though on different grounds, were criticising the existence of the Party.¹ During the first two years of the existence of the Party the communists argued that the C.S.P. was not a truly socialist party but was an example of social fascism and that if it was a truly socialist party it should not remain in the Congress which was the mass organization of the Indian bourgeoisie and that by remaining in the Congress it was only increasing the hold of the bourgeoisie over the masses. Royists argued that the chief task facing all imperialists was to strengthen the Congress by making it a truly representative mass organization and that this was a 'nationalist' and not a 'socialist' task and, therefore, inside the Congress, the Congress Socialists should not function as socialists and as a Party but as mere Left Congressmen.

Various Congress Socialist leaders met these criticisms of the leftists. Narain maintained that by remaining in the Congress they were not strengthening the hold of the bourgeoisie over the anti-imperialist elements within the Congress; on the contrary, the very purpose of the Party remaining in the Congress was to weaken by inside propaganda and education, that hold and ripen the anti-imperi-

1. We shall refer to their views in detail in the next Chapter.

alist elements for a final break with it.¹ He also argued that it was the Party's going out of the Congress that would, by isolating the most conscious elements in it from the rank and file, lead to its continued attachment to the bourgeois programme.

Both Narain and Dev expressed many times the view that the responsibility for their organising a separate Party of Socialism lay on others and in particular on the communists, who followed a wrong policy in relation to the nationalist movement represented by the Congress.² Narain also met the criticism of those who maintained that the Congress was a bourgeois body and thus ridiculed the whole idea of its transformation. He said that the socialists did not hold such views. He admitted that the Congress as then constituted was dominated by the upper class interests and its leaders were uncompromisingly opposed to admitting into its objectives any programme of the economic emancipation of the masses. Yet there was a very large body of opinion which would welcome such a programme.³ It was this section which was to be persuaded and brought under radical left leadership. Indeed the process of radicalization of the Congress started from the time the left elements started taking shape and had not the communists left the Congress in 1929 this process of radicalization would have gone much further.⁴ There was no doubt that "ultimately by a process of transformation the Congress can become a fit instrument for the achievement of our objective."⁵

One line of leftist criticism was that socialism was a special task of the proletariat and that it was only a workers' party that could build it. To accomplish this task, therefore, it must act as an independent class-force and must have an independent political organization outside

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 157.

2. *N. Dev: Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 75.

3. *J. P. Narain, Towards Struggle*, p. 130.

4. *Ibid*, p. 132.

5. *N. Dev: Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 127.

the Congress. To this was also sometimes added the criticism that it was difficult to reconcile nationalism with socialism. The socialist leaders replied to these criticisms variously. Firstly, they pointed out that their left critics did not take into consideration the circumstances in which the C.S.P. was born, namely, its origin in the course of the national movement.¹ They also argued that being born out of that struggle, the Congress Socialists could not and should not keep out of the movement. "We don't wish to isolate ourselves from the great national movement which the Congress symbolizes."² Since many of these Congress Socialist leaders proclaimed themselves to be Marxists, they also felt it necessary to point out how their being Marxist did not mean that they should not take part in the national movement. As Marxists their goal certainly was the establishment of socialism but the existing stage of the Indian struggle was that of the bourgeois democratic revolution and, therefore, it would be a suicidal policy for socialists to cut themselves off from the national movement that the Congress undoubtedly represented.³ Of course, this did not mean that they were drawing any hard and fast line between national and social revolutions. As Marxists, they said, they could not do so. In the Indian conditions, the probability was that both the revolutions might be carried out simultaneously, but nothing could be said about it with certainty. Only this much could be said with certainty, that for a subject country national independence was an inevitable stage on the way to socialism.⁴ "Capitalist democracy is any day preferable to serfdom and subjection to alien rule. And he will be a short-sighted and a very narrow socialist who will refuse to take part in a national struggle simply on the ground that the struggle is being principally conducted by petty-bourgeois elements of society, although he will make ceaseless efforts to give it a socialist direction. In the peculiar conditions of India,

1. *N. Dev : Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 74.

2. *Address of N. Dev, at the First Pa'na Conference. Ibid*, p. 4.

3. *Ibid*.

4. *Ibid*.

the socialist can very well work within the Congress and confine the national struggle with socialism.”¹

Congress Socialism in reality, Dev argued, was the Indian transliteration of the Russian ‘Social Democracy’ which expressed the independence of the two revolutions, the one social and the other political.² Dev said that for this reason the Party might have called itself Social Democratic Party but that name had acquired bad connotations due to the betrayal of the European Social Democrats in the First War.³ But it had also to reject the name communist party because certain approbrium was attached to the Communist Party for its isolation from the national movement.⁴ The word Congress that was added to Socialism symbolized this struggle for a democratic regime.⁵

Answer to the Right :— Similarly, the C.S.P. leaders met the various charges from the Right. Against the charge of disruption they argued that they really were not disrupting the Congress, but were only strengthening it by aiming at its reorganization so that it might quickly and effectively attain the goal of independence that it had put on its banner. Speaking about it Narain said: “People believe that that would destroy the ‘national’ character of the Congress. What it would really do, however, was to convert it from a bourgeois body into a mass organization. It would mean a sudden leap for the Congress though a fall from its present respectability.”⁶ We have already noted how in replying to the charges of the Congress Working Committee the C.S.P. leaders categorically stated that they were custodians of the Congress and that they wanted to enhance its prestige. Sometimes the Right Congress leaders also made the charge that as internationalists they were not to be relied upon in the national movement. To this the

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 115.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Narain; Why Socialism? p. 154.*

Socialist leaders replied that there was no antagonism between independence and socialism, and that nationalism and internationalism could be very well combined.¹ It was only a crude, self-seeking and egocentric nationalism that came in conflict with internationalism. Socialist internationalism, in fact, was the only panacea in this world of sovereign nations.

Socialists were often accused by the Right wing Congressmen of "attempting to import a foreign system in India." In meeting this charge Narain said that the so-called 'Indian' solutions could not take the place of socialism under the existing conditions.² He argued that the Indian society had changed so drastically since these solutions were offered, and its problems had been transformed so radically that the ideas of the social philosophers of ancient India hardly bore any relation to existing facts.³ Landlordism was an un-Indian institution, mills and factories were new and so also were the classes that had sprung up. Thus the society that had emerged in India, its economic system, resembled similar societies and similar systems in the countries of the West. Capitalism was a universal phenomenon and so likewise was socialism which came into being as a reaction to this system. As an inevitable reaction to the capitalist system socialism was not bound by any national frontier.⁴

Narain further showed that in India, too, there was poverty on the one hand and wealth and luxury on the other. In India, too, there was exploitation and the means of production were also in private hands. And, be it remembered, that was independent of imperialism and would continue even after it.⁵

The objections to socialism were put in other ways also. It was often argued that India's conditions were

1. *Narendra Dev* : *Ibid*, p. 67.

2. *J. P. Narain* : *Towards Struggle*, p. 21.

3. *Ibid*.

4. *J. P. Narain* : *Why Socialism?* p. 25.

5. *J. P. Narain* : *Towards Struggle*, p. 100.

peculiar, that India's traditions were different, that India was an industrially backward country and, therefore, socialism was inapplicable here. As regards this plea of backwardness, Narain admitted that the existence of feudalistic relics in India would modify its problems to some extent but it would not change its essential nature. The balance of power between the various sections of the exploited masses would be somewhat different and their transition to socialism slower, otherwise their goal as well as their initial task of overthrowing the mixed system of capitalist feudal exploitation and rule, would remain essentially the same as in the developed capitalist countries.¹

He also met the criticism that socialism was opposed to Indian culture. He said that as far as he could see Indian traditions were not "averse to the sharing of life and its privileges." To set socialism and Indian culture as antithetical on the supposed 'individualism' of the latter was not correct. If individual perfection was the goal, it was difficult to see how it could not come under a socialist society. Individualism had been the predominant motive in Indian culture only in the sense that perfection of the individual had been its ideals, never in the sense of a narrow self-seeking individualism. Such perfection was only possible under a socialist society.

Criticism of Dr. Das' Ancient Scientific Socialism

Among the alternatives to socialism that were suggested in India, constructed on the various pleas of spiritualism, indigenous Indian system, eternal principles of Indian thought and culture, etc. was one suggested by Dr. Bhagwan Das, the renowned theosophist scholar of Benaras and a close associate of Mrs. Annie Besant. In his book "Ancient vrs. Modern Scientific Socialism" and very many other articles and essays, Dr. Das elaborated what he regarded as his Scheme of Ancient Scientific Socialism.²

1. *Ibid*, p. 82.

2. For a complete knowledge of Das' Scheme see Dr. B. Das: *Ancient vrs. Modern Scientific Socialism*.

Dr. Das, it would be remembered, was the co-author of the Das-Das Swaraj Scheme on the basis of which the Swaraj Party was sought to be organised in early twenties.¹ Dr. Das had been also critical of the Congress and Gandhi for not making clear the social, economic and political goals they were aiming at. In this he was with the left, though his reasons were different; for while the left forces criticized the Congress for this vagueness and ambiguity because they wanted it to declare itself for complete social economic and political emancipation of the Indian people, Dr. Das was more critical of it because he wished that the social, economic and political pattern-to-be should be based on the ancient Hindu ideals, especially those prescribed by Manu, the social theoretician of the ancient Hindus. Reaction in India to these Manuic ideals had been two-fold. There were those who regarded them as reactionary and unprogressive and at best out of date, and unsuitable and unworkable in contemporary Indian conditions. And there were the extremists on the Right who thought that these ideals were based on those eternal principles which were the copyright of the Indian thought and that, therefore, they should be copied blindly. Dr. Das took a different position. He, of course, belonged to the Rightist group in this controversy but he also criticised the complexities and defects that had, in the course of time, grown around the scheme. Stripped of these defects, however, he thought, the Manuic solution was not only workable in India but it was also the only ideal that should be emulated by the present generations of Indians. It was this old puritan Varnashram Dharma prescribed by Manu which Dr. Das styled as Ancient Scientific Socialism and presented it as an alternative, rather the only alternative, to Modern Scientific Socialism.

In the Foreword to his book Dr. Das laid down what might be called the theoretical foundation of his whole scheme. He writes : "India's slogans should be not merely the Materialist Interpretation of History not class war

1. We referred to it in Chapter II, beginning.

(except as may be made absolutely unavoidable by ruthless abduacy on the part of capitalists), but class-reconciliation; not a classless society, nor a dichotomised Rich-and-Poor Society, nor an infinitely subdivided fissiparous casteful Society, but a 'Society of Temperamental-Vocational classes justly coordinated; an equitability in the partition of different kinds of work and of corresponding appropriate sufficient Recompense and Incentive nor the crushing of all individuality but the careful fostering of individual speciality in consonance with Social solidarity, not a sudden and complete break with the past, but a continuity of the peculiar National Genius of the best ancient Traditions not abolition of Religion and Property and Family but the indigenous and genuinely philosophical, psychological 'Ancient time-tested Scientific Socialism' of the best Indian Tradition."

it was such a solution that according to Dr. Das, Manu had given in his permanent Plan of the Individual Life and the Social Life in combination, for the whole of the Human Race. In that Plan were included the fundamental Principles of Planned Education, Planned Family-life, Planned Economy, Planned Defence, Sanitation, Judication, and Planned Religion, Recreation, Art.¹

Dr. Das thought that the psychological principles on which the Varnashram Dharma was based were eternal and as such applicable in all ages and to all countries. It was because of this that he made a trenchant criticism of socialism and communism. He criticised the latter for abolishing religion, private property and family. He thought that instincts for food, for private possession, for property, for spouse, are inherent in the embodied soul,² and that 'religion is spiritual hunger, the psychical counterpart of physical hunger.'³ It is their misuse that is the cause of the greatest miseries of man. For example, priest-craft was a 'perversion of religion'. But there was nothing

1. See, B. Das: *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 21.

3. *Ibid*,

wrong with Religion, Private Property and Family as such. Buddha, Christ and other religious reformers had all been genuine socialists.¹

In criticising this Ancient Scientific Socialism of Dr. Das, the Congress Socialists did not so much care to meet his criticism of socialism and Marxism. The basic principles of their own outlook they took for granted, every bit as much as did Dr. Das. On the contrary, they concentrated their attack mainly upon the scheme of Dr. Das and tried to show that his scheme was not only unscientific but impracticable and unworkable in the changed conditions of the contemporary Indian society.² Both Narain and Sampurnanand made it clear that the division which Das envisaged was arbitrary and out of date. First of all it was difficult to maintain a distinction between the various professions which Das' scheme implied. For example, it was difficult to maintain a distinction between the learned and executive professions, as the higher executive positions in a modern and rational society are likely to be filled up by men coming from learned professions, and lower executive offices with the labouring classes. Yet this was what in Das' scheme should not happen.³ Further, it was a mistake to call the class of merchants, industrialists, bankers, etc. a wealth-making class, for wealth is really made by the labouring class.⁴ Sampurnanand argued that whatever might have been the utility of the scheme when it was made in ancient times, the economic conditions of the modern society had changed considerably and, therefore, the four-fold division had outlived its utility.⁵ Conditions in ancient India were quite simple. Land was in abundance and consequently there could be no exploitation of the agriculturists. Instruments of production were simple and exploitation of labour was not possible. In a

1. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

2. Two leaders of the Party criticised this scheme, Sampurnanand in his *Samajvada* and J. P. in *Why Socialism?*

3. Narain : *Why Socialism?* p. 117.

4. *Ibid.* Also see Sampurnanand : *Samajvada*, p. 56.

5. Sampurnanand, *Ibid.*, p. 57.

modern society strong industrial and commercial classes had emerged and, by ownership of means of production, they had a dominating hand in every aspect of social life. They even controlled organs of state-power.¹ And even in a society in which the division which Dr. Das envisaged were carried out, this class would be dominant and would control all administrative and executive professions.²

Another great problem, the Socialist leaders argued, was how this division was to be carried out and who was to carry it out. It was on this practical test that the scheme foundered. No modern state would be willing to undertake this task, not merely because of the stupendousness of the task which required to put people in the four-fold divisions and to make them conform to the codes prescribed for them, but also because the wealth-owning class would resist such an attempt.³

Dr. Das, indeed, suggested that this was not to be carried out by any state, and that the method employed was to be that of persuasion and for this, it was essential to create a permanent class of persons, from whom primarily good and wise legislatures and secondly, trustworthy rulers could be drawn, and who could have sufficient honoured recognition amidst and influence over the general public to be able to check effectively the aberrations of persons in official authority.⁴ For this he also suggested the establishment of schools of yoga and the revival of the system of Ashrams.⁵ Speaking of this inspired vision of the learned doctor Narain said: "In a world where the universities turn out job-hungry youths, where society is governed by self-and-class interest, where the state is conscious instrument of class rule, where senility is yoked to self-seeking with the aid of money-glands, the vision of Dr. Das seems too unreal and foreign indeed."⁶ In fact, it

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Narain, Ibid, p. 117.*

3. *Narain, Ibid, pp. 120-21.*

4. *B. Das : Ibid, pp. 151-52.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid, p. 122.*

is impossible in a capitalist society for these missionaries of Brahma to be born. Dr. Das' assumption that if there were enough such missionaries in Society, the world would have been cured of its disease, was to put the cart before the horse. It is more correct to say that there are no 'missionaries of Brahma' in the present world because it is dominated by capitalism and imperialism than to say that it is because there are no 'missionaries of Brahma' that the world is dominated by this iniquitous system.¹ The Capitalist society has its own standards and produces and values a different type of man. But it may be argued, what about the 'missionaries of socialism'? Narain said that that was easy to explain, because capitalism itself produces them. It was in the soil of the class-war set up in a capitalist society that socialism takes roots and grows.

Here Narain came to the superiority of the socialist method and socialist ideal and showed how a mere division of society into four or any number of professions could not solve the problem which faced present-day society and which Dr. Das also admitted, namely, the problem of exploitation and gross economic inequality. Only socialism held the key to the solution of this problem. No society can be divided artificially and according to apriori theory of social thinkers; social division is an organic process of society, and as Marx showed, its primary source lay in the manner in which men earned their livelihood.² Therefore, before suggesting an alternative method it would have been better if Dr. Das had paused a little to consider why present society was so divided. The present divisions, either in India or abroad, have not been superimposed from outside, they have grown up naturally from their respective social soils. If we have a different sort of division, we must prepare the necessary soil.³ It was here that the superiority of the socialist method lay, for socialism points out that so long as the means of production and

1. *Ibid*, p. 124.

2. *Ibid*, p. 118.

3. *Ibid*, p. 119.

exchange were in private hands, the present unjust division of society and its system of exploitation was bound to continue.

Critique of Gandhism

It was also because such importance was laid on the importance of socialism even in the anti-imperialist struggle that a severe criticism of Gandhism was made. To be sure all the leaders of the Party were not involved in this and only the Marxists among them were vociferous.

But even when they criticised Gandhism, they not only did not have any animosity towards Mahatma Gandhi whom they acknowledged as a revolutionary mass leader but many of them had cordial personal relationship with him which deepened as years rolled by. As a leader with remarkable foresight the Mahatma could well foresee that many of the utterances of the Congress Socialists were made in an enthusiastic, impatient mood of youthful exuberance which were found to wear down in course of time. The Mahatma's attitude to the socialists, thus, was not one of hostility. He looked upon them like a forgetful, loving father to his disobedient sons. This had become evident from the time the Mahatma made his first statement on socialist programme on 1st June, 1934, and then on September 17, 1934. The latter statement read: "I have welcomed the formation of the socialist group. Many of them are respected and self-sacrificing co-workers. With all this, I have fundamental difference with them on the programme published in their authorised pamphlets. But I would not, by reason of the moral pressure I may be able to exert, suppress the spread of ideas propounded in their literature. I may not interfere with the spread of those ideas, however distasteful some of them may be to me."

Among the socialists who had personal respects for Gandhijee were Achyut Patwardhan, Narendra Dev, Jai Prakash Narain and Ram Manohar Lohia. Narendra Dev valued satyagraha as a technique of organised mass pressure and regarded Gandhijee as a great national leader who could start a struggle against imperialism.

It is also noteworthy that despite criticism of Gandhism, they wholeheartedly participated in the movements started by Mahatma Gandhi; even participated in his constructive activities and wore Khadi clothes and donned Gandhi caps.

In course of time most Congress Socialists became more and more appreciative of Gandhi and Gandhism, in the proportion as there was a gradual abandonment of Marxism.

In J. P. Narain's book "Why Socialism" we get a bitter criticism of Gandhism, which was regarded as a reformist philosophy. It is a criticism advanced from a thorough-going Marxist standpoint. Gandhism, indeed, was advanced as an alternative, the sole alternative, to socialism in India and it was regarded as the most distinctive and the most original contribution of India to the modern world. "Gandhism is true socialism for India", it was suggested. It were not only the supporters of Gandhi and Gandhism who regarded it as the sole alternative to socialism, Gandhi himself on several occasions spoke of 'indigenous socialism', suited to the 'essential genius of India' and based on 'fundamental conception of Hinduism'. He used to criticize Western socialists as materialistic and Western socialism as being based on a conception of human nature fundamentally opposed to the Indian conception.

Narain started by describing Gandhism as a 'curious philosophy' and said that there was nothing new or distinctive about it, nothing that was peculiarly Indian. Similar alternatives to socialism were advanced in the West. And all these alternatives had pronounced family resemblances. What Gandhi said had been said by Church divines and philosophers of the old order in Europe at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.¹ These resemblances could be reduced to certain common features. There was found in all of them a conscious attempt to run away from strife and struggle, which would involve a rapid departure

1. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

from the status quo; and, therefore, a tendency to compose the serious differences and maladjustments—the existence of which were universally admitted—by the development of a common understanding and goodwill. The method suggested was invariably the betterment of human nature through education and the placing of individuals of high moral and intellectual qualities in positions of authority and power.¹ A large number of Western writers had expressed themselves in more or less the same vein. The arguments varied in their emphasis but the core remained much the same : class struggle was futile; capital and labour were interdependent and necessary for each other; revolution was wasteful, a synthesis of the contending forces of society was a higher ideal than revolution, enlightened control of profits, wages and prices was necessary and possible; the theory of trusteeship—these were the most familiar ideas of the West preached by bourgeois professors, thinkers and churchmen.²

Before proceeding further with the criticism of Gandhism, Narain pointed out that the solution that the socialists aimed at must be kept in view : they were interested in permanently destroying the basis of economic exploitation and inequality. It was this that should be clearly remembered in any criticism of Gandhism. The starting point of socialism was the enquiry into the cause of economic inequality, into the origin of feudal rule, the landlords, capitalists and paupers, and to lay bare the secrets of human exploitation. When at the end of the enquiry the socialist arrives at the root cause, his course of action is then directed to remove it. The remedy is applied at the material source of the social evil.³ But Gandhism did not interest itself in making any enquiry. It did not occur to it as to why society was controlled by a handful of princes, landlords and capitalists, while the great majority of the people were paupers. Gandhism accepted the established order. Its concern was only to

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Opt. Cit. p. 87.*

3. *Opt. Cit. p. 88.*

improve the conduct of the higher classes towards the lower. But according to Narain, this philosophy amounts to deception—self-deception—and hence the deception of the exploited people. According to socialists the wealth of the landlords and the capitalists comes from the labour of the ryots and workers and was, therefore, in the famous phrase of Proudhon, theft. To condone their theft, to let it go unquestioned, nay, to sanctify it, was a deceptive philosophy—no matter how unconsciously so.¹

The higher classes were not only guilty of theft but also of violence—because they maintained the system under the threat of violence. By not questioning the right of the prince, landlord and capitalist to continue their functions, Gandhijee had signified his tacit approval of this large-scale organised theft and violence. Nay, the approval was not tacit, it was open and avowed.² Narain here referred to the interview of Mahatma Gandhi with the U.P. Zamindars in which he had assured them that he would resist any attempt to deprive them of their property. He had also told the Ahmedabad Mill owners that it was their moral right to make the money they were making.

An integral and essential part of Gandhi's social philosophy was his Theory of Trusteeship and both Narain and Sampurnanand made a trenchant criticism of it. This Theory of Trusteeship had been regarded by the Right and many others as being truly Indian and natural to the country's spirit of non-violence. Narain pointed out that in this theory also there was nothing that was new, nothing that was particularly Indian. Similar ideas had been expressed by moral and religious preachers of the West.

Coming to his criticisms of the Trusteeship theory he said that this suffered from being indefinite and self-contradictory. If the landlords and capitalists were to be regarded as trustees then various questions arose : was the landlord, for example, to hold as trust the whole or a portion of his wealth ? If a portion how much, and who was to

1. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

determine that portion? If tenants were equal sharers in his wealth, what exactly was meant by an equal share?¹ Did it mean that half of the property belonged to the landlord and half to the tenants? Again how could a sharer be at the same time a trustee? What again was the meaning of harmonious cooperation and who was to bring this about?² kR--f

There were also other weightier questions. Why was the tenant or the labourer an equal owner with his master? What proof could Gandhijee show to justify his assertions? If it were argued that they were equal owners of their master's property because they were its producers, why were they not allowed to keep to themselves what they produced? The same question could be considered from another point of view. Why should the upper classes act as trustees? They can very well assert, as in fact they do, that their wealth is wholly theirs, carried by their brains and capital, and that no one has any claim to it.³ If, on the contrary, the property in their hands was not really theirs, no one had any justification in encouraging them to keep it.

According to Narain, there were only two alternatives: either to prove that the wealth of the wealthy was unjustly acquired and then to demand their expropriation; or to admit that it is rightfully theirs, and in all decency let them enjoy it, instead of trotting out pious wishes so that the poor may not feel that they are to be neglected.⁴ The problem, Narain went on, was not one of morality or ethics. It was a problem of the scientific analysis of property and the method of its production and distribution. This analysis was precisely the achievement of Marx who went into the root of the matter, and having done so provided the remedy. Here was the real difference bet-

1. *Ibid*, p. 86 (quoted).

2. *Ibid*, pp. 90-91.

3. *Ibid*, p. 91.

4. *Ibid*, p. 92.

ween Socialism and Gandhism—not in the ‘materialism’ of the one and the ‘spiritualism’ of the other.¹

Sampurnanand similarly criticised this theory. The first objection that he brought out was that the wealthy classes were themselves not ready to implement it. Secondly, he pointed out that the whole conception of trusteeship was inapplicable to the actual relationship that existed, for a trustee is appointed only when the real owner of property was a minor, but once he becomes a major it is returned to him. But here the wealthy classes were to be perpetual trustees, and ‘real property owners’ could not even touch it.² Like Narain he also argued that Gandhism did not offer a solution to the problem, but was merely a palliative.³ Narain advanced further criticisms of Gandhism. Gandhi had asked the landlords and millowners to act as trustees and had expressed the belief that this could be brought about by a change of heart on their part. The owning classes had, therefore, to be persuaded to realise that they were not exclusive owners of the mills, and workmen were equal sharers in the ownership. Narain said that the worth of this theory should be judged by what practical results it had produced. Gandhi, for example, had been associated with the Labour Union of Ahmedabad and was one of its builders. Could he say what change of heart he had noticed in the struggle between the Union and the millowners? Or was it simply that whatever compromises on hours and wages, etc. had been made were due to the strength of the Union, the risk of general strike, etc. on the one hand, and the personal influence of Gandhi on the other? And if during his lifetime, Gandhijee had not succeeded in reaching the hearts of the upper classes, how did he expect that this would be done after he was removed from the arena of the world?⁴

Narain observed that the agency that was to bring about this change of heart must be effective and self-pro-

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 88.

2. *See Sampurnanand : Samajvada*, pp. 42-43.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

creating. But what was the guarantee that an acquired virtue of heart would be necessarily inherited? This conversion, moreover, would have to be carried on in an environment to which the very idea of trusteeship was foreign and, therefore, it would not succeed.

The question really was not one of human nature or the change of human nature. Socialist denial of philosophy that a moral change was the fundamental element in social progress was not due to his lack of faith in human nature. Gandhi had misunderstood socialism when he thought that it was based upon the selfishness of human nature. Had the socialists taken such a low view of human nature, they would never have dared to proclaim as their ideal a society based on the pursuit of common welfare.¹

According to Narain what was needed was not a change of heart on the part of landlords and capitalists but a social revolution. There was an intimate connection between behaviour and environment, and it is the social environment which shapes human behaviour. A capitalist exploits labour not because he is vicious but because that is what the particular society in which he lives wants him to do. If he attempted to do anything else, he would be pushed aside and others would take his place.² The socialist solution, therefore, was that if the behaviour of the whole groups and classes has to be changed, a change should be effected in the social organization itself. Human nature responds not to the so-called spirit that is said to be in all of us but to the environment. The Socialists want first to change the social environment and acquire full power over the state in order to be in possession of the means of propaganda and education. He first creates the predisposing environment and then uses systematic methods of education.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Gandhi often used to say, of course, mostly for popular appeal, that he was for Ramrajya.¹ For example, in his interview to the U.P. Zamindars we referred to earlier he had said : "The Ramrajya of my dream ensures the right alike of the prince and the pauper." Both Narain and Sampurnanand examined this ideal and pointed to the flaws that they saw in it. They carefully noted the point that even in this Ramrajya of yore there were both princes and paupers and that even in Gandhijee's dream Ramrajya there would be paupers. What the idealizers of Ramrajya or what even Gandhi meant by asserting that in Ramrajya both rich and poor would live in harmony, was to show how just this Rajya was, but the socialists, as might be expected, chose this as the weakest spot in the Gandhian dreamland. With a tinge of irony Narain observed : "But the interesting, almost breath-taking fact, is that in even Gandhijee's dream Ramrajya there will be paupers." He proceeded : "A Ramrajya of paupers and princes. Why not ? How else will the noble souls get an opportunity to practise deeds of high-minded philanthropy and thus prove the Hindu conception of human nature."²

One aspect of the Gandhian criticism was part of its wider criticism of industrial civilisation itself. Gandhi, as is well known, was a bitter critic of the modern industrial civilisation, its machineries and factories, the ugliness and strife and materialism that it brings in its train. Gandhi and very many other Indian leaders were insisting

1. Rama is the hero of the popular Hindu epic Ramayan which was first written by Valmiki in Sanskrit and later on in Hindi by the famous Hindi poet Tulsidas who lived during the reign of Akbar. Rama is regarded by the Hindus as the incarnation of God, one of those periodic incarnations in which Hindus believe. He was born as a prince, fought many battles against the 'demons', for preserving dharma and ruled for many years. Both the authors idealize the state of his kingdom and rule and it has been an article of faith with Hindus to equate all good government with Ram Raj (Rule of Ram). In India one line of attack on socialism was that much before its advent there was real socialism in 'Rama Rajya' and that the same ideals could again be established and that they only should be realised and not 'foreign socialism.'
2. *Ibid*, p. 88.

that India must return to her simple village-life which prevailed there before the advent of the foreign rule. He and others, therefore, criticised socialism even for standing for this civilisation. But as socialism is an integral part of industrial civilisation itself, Congress Socialists had to meet this criticism too. A fine and representative account of the Socialist view in this matter is contained in Asoka Mehta's little book of the period, "Socialism and Gandhism", which was a reprint of his articles on the subject in the Party paper, the "Congress Socialist".

Mehta starts by saying that the Gandhian reaction to industrialism was not new. Similar reactions against it had taken place in the countries of the West, the most obvious example of which being the Romantic reaction. The fact was that industrialism was introduced by capitalism and in the minds of many, capitalism and industrialism had become inseparable and interchangeable. The consequences had been that the results of capitalism, good or bad, had been accredited to industrialism too. It was, however, improper to do so. In fact, they were separable and socialism was industrialism minus capitalism plus some other values for which socialism stood.¹ Gandhism, Mehta maintained, was like the romantic reaction of the West, though not without its own distinctive features, but in essence it had the same qualities and suffered from the same defects.

Mehta maintained that there should and could be no return to cottage industry and the self-contained and self-sufficient villages.² He argued that in part this reaction was due to historical reasons. The modern machine economy had come to India in the wake of the foreign conquest and hence antipathy to mechanization had become identified with antipathy to it. The two other reasons were : (a) the belief that the masses were happy and could be happy under ancient handicraft economy, (b) the ugliness and inhumanity of mechanized industry. Belief

1. See, A. Mehta : *Socialism and Gandhism*, Chapter I.

2. *Ibid*, Chapter I,

in (a) had been most persistent and prevalent in India but Mehta said that it was not true to say that in the past (even in the most palmy days) the economic and cultural problems of the masses had been solved.¹

According to Mehta, the craft economy could provide the Indian people with wherewithal of life only if (i) their wants were cut to a minimum, (ii) they worked hard and denied leisure to themselves, and (iii) the population decreased or at least remained stationary. The first two were the tenets of faith of Gandhism. But according to Mehta India had so much leeway to make that to "talk of limiting our wants is to mock our starving millions."

C. S. P. and Marxism

It has been claimed by many C. S. P. leaders that their Party was a Marxist Party and that their socialism was the scientific socialism of Karl Marx. We have seen how the C. S. P. consisted mostly of middle class intellectuals who had come under the influence both of the nationalist movement and of socialism. Many of these intellectuals considered themselves Marxists and were proud of calling themselves so. Even the Party called itself a Marxist Party. Speaking at the very first socialist conference at Patna Narendra Dev asked his comrades to "understand dialectical method propounded by Marx."² "We are dealing with scientific and not Utopian socialism", he said. He, however, added : "We should avoid dogmatism and sectarianism. We must take our stand on scientific socialism and steer clear of Utopian socialism and social reformism."³ In the very first page of his book "Why Socialism", Narain observed that "to-day more than ever before it is possible to say that there is only one type, one theory of socialism, Marxism." The Meerut Thesis of the Party which distinguished between the anti-imperialist programme and a socialist programme further observed : "The Party's own programme must be a Marxist one, otherwise the Party will fail to fulfil its task and leadership. Marx-

1. *Ibid*, Chapter III.

2. *N. Dev : Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 24.

3. *Ibid*.

ism alone can guide the anti-imperialist forces to their ultimate destiny. Party members must, therefore, fully understand the technique of revolution, the theory and practice of the class struggle, the nature of the state and the processes leading to the socialist society."¹ In fact both the Meerut Thesis and the Faizpur Thesis bore the distinct impress of Marxism in the programmes they enunciated. But adoption of Marxism as the basis of the Party at Meerut was not without any opposition. Indeed some members had wanted it to be Marxist-Leninist but it was due to opposition from others that Leninism was dropped and Marxism was adopted as a compromise. We have already seen how even in the tactics relating to the anti-imperialist struggle, the need for class-differentiation was stressed and the need for alliance of all uncompromising anti-imperialist elements under the leadership of revolutionary socialism was emphasized.

It is thus clear that many of the leaders of the Party were doctrinaire Marxists and not only sincerely believed that they were so but also believed that socialism was the only panacea for the world and that there could be only one type of socialism, that is Marxian Socialism. The whole tone of their utterances leaves no doubt about the sincerity of their belief and conviction. Whether they were criticising Gandhism or Political Democracy or Capitalism, they again and again emphasized their Marxian standpoint. Let us look, for example, at their criticism of Political Democracy. It was in this spirit of professed Marxism that political democracy as an alternative to socialism was rejected outright and, therefore, any conception of Swaraj (Independence) as a synonym of political democracy was criticised.² On the basis of an analysis of the historical role of democracy, Narain showed that democracy had failed to deliver the results that were expected of it by its early champions. For example, in the days of Bentham and Godwin it was believed that if the franchise were extended

1. See, *Meerut Thesis*.

2. See *Narain : Why Socialism*, p. 75.

to every adult it would be possible for the people to gain control of the state and wipe off all injustices and evils of society. But the millenium refused to arrive even after adult franchise was granted. What then was wrong with political democracy? It was that its machinery was such that in a society where great differences in wealth and social status exist, the classes which are economically dominant easily capture and enslave it.¹

Historically speaking, democracy was the instrument of the rising bourgeoisie in its fight against feudalism but the forces which gave rise to democracy themselves tied it to the chariot wheel of capitalism. The democratic state became a tool whereby the rule of the bourgeoisie was established and maintained. Thus, behind the fiction of the Peoples' Sovereignty stalks naked class rule. The experience of every democratic country of the West, the Marxist Congress Socialists argued, proves this beyond the shadow of a doubt.² Therefore, the liberals and the majority of the older Congressmen who had no brighter vision for their country than mere representative Government, were backing a wrong horse; for in India an experiment with pure democracy would yield no better results. On the contrary, the democratic Indian state might become a worse tool in the hands of the upper classes for grinding the faces of the poor and the exploited.³

And, therefore, speaking immediately in relation to India, Narain said categorically: "I have again and again been faced with the naive question: would not the masses, if every adult had a vote, capture the political machinery and run it in their own interest? The answer is most emphatically in the negative. The masses, better educated politically than in India, have nowhere done so. While democracy has conferred on them equality of status in a formal, legal sense, it has not enabled them anywhere to

1. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

free themselves from exploitation, hunger, unemployment and slavery.¹

Similar criticisms of political democracy are to be found in the writings of Sampurnanand and Narendra Dev.² They both maintained that political democracy had failed in the West, that it could not bring economic democracy, and that it should not be emulated in India.³

It was because these Marxists among the Congress Socialists put such faith in Marxism that they criticised those who attacked it on one ground or other. Thus N. Dev met the criticism of those who attacked it for being materialistic. Drawing frequently upon the writings of Marx, he pointed out that in Marxism there was enough scope for the flourishing of intellectual and spiritual values.⁴ Narain similarly took a singularly materialistic standpoint in his "Why Socialism" and in other writings. He defended the Marxian labour theory of value and surplus value and maintained that labour was the sole creator of wealth.⁵ Speaking of the socialist solution Narain maintained that it was to abolish private ownership of means of production and exchange and to establish over them the ownership of the whole community. He also maintained that 'nothing short of a dictatorship would be required to carry it through'.⁶ In his first report as the Organising Secretary of the Party, he opined that the Party should be a working class Party, well-organised and well-disciplined and should be both selective and restrictive.

Thus, the party's theses as well as the utterances of the dominant leaders of the Party show that the C.S.P. in the beginning was developing along a Marxist line. But this characterization of the Marxist nature of the Party does

1. *Ibid*, p. 76.

2. *Sampurnanand : Samajvada*, pp 223-236, and *N. Dev, Socialism and National Revolution*, pp. 15-25.

3. *Ibid*.

4. *N. Dev : Ibid*, pp. 20-21.

5. *Narain, Ibid*, p. 8, p. 14.

6. *Narain : "Towards Struggle"*, p. 74.

not at all show the pulls of other forces like Gandhism, nationalism, democracy, etc. that were always taking place. It were these forces that, in course of years, ultimately triumphed. But how in course of time many of the ambiguities in the standpoint of the C.S.P. were clarified is intimately connected with its practical politics—a process that we shall examine in the next chapter which will also deal with their brand of Marxism in action.

CONCLUSION

The formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 as a left-wing inside the National Congress was a far-reaching event. Though itself not a homogeneous group, the C.S.P. maintained an atmosphere of complete independence and of socialism inside the Congress and a number of the decisions of the Congress bore the impact of this group.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The United Front (1935-39)

During the mid-thirties there came on to the political scene in India, as in a number of countries, a new political alliance, the United Front. In the West this United Front, initiated and popularised by the communists, was designed to meet the menace of Fascism-Nazism by putting a check on the growth of Fascist tendencies inside each individual country and by arresting the drift to War. The underlying motive which prompted the formation of the United Front was the defence of the interests of World Communism and of the Soviet Union. In India, while elements of anti-Fascism and pro-Sovietism¹ were not absent, the United Front was directed more towards the creation of a broad Anti-Imperialist United Front. The situation in India, heightened by the failure of the successive Congress movements, was peculiarly favourable for this move. A feeling fast grew among the left elements that the unity of all genuinely anti-imperialist forces was a condition for the success of the nationalist movement. It was this over-riding interest of the nationalist movement, more than anything else, which produced the unity atmosphere so characteristic of this period. Unity slogans started to be raised everywhere : in the Trade Unions, in the Kisan (Peasant) Organizations, and from all left platforms. Because of the existence of doctrinaire and other obstacles which will be related later, a real United Front of all the left elements for all time and for all purposes could not be created and even when it continued there were cracks and fissures, yet this period witnessed a confluence of united left actions on many occasions, the like of which was not seen in India

1. *This has been discussed in the last Chapter in connection with the elaboration of the theme, introduction of elements of internationalism in the left-wing ideas.*

either before or ever after. The main issues on which the United Front was sought to be forged were in the main those that were incorporated in the nationalist section of the Programme of the C.S.P. and need not be elaborated here. But to enumerate them briefly, they were : to establish a United Anti-Imperialist Front; to start work on the basis of the National Congress for that process; to make it a truly mass organization; to advocate for this purpose association of mass organizations of peasants and workers by way of collective affiliation; to pressurise the Congress into adopting a minimum programme of the masses; to move the Congress to resume national struggle; to check the drift of the National Congress to constitutionalism; to advocate the rights of the peoples of the Native States for democracy and to oppose the New Constitution embodied in the Government of India Act (1935) and to demand for a C. A. As sidelights were slogans against the dangers of impending imperialist war, against fascism and in favour of the Soviet Union. The Congress Socialist Party was, by and large, the most important and the most enthusiastic initiator and supporter of such a United Front; the unity atmosphere first developed from the platform of this Party. Owing primary allegiance to nationalism and to the goal of national freedom the Party, from the start, thought in terms of a United Front. The other participants in this drama were : the All-India Kisan (Peasant) Congress, the A.I.T.U.C., in the beginning the hesitant Roy Group, the Communists and, to a lesser extent, a few left Congressmen like Nehru and Bose. The organizations of students, women and youth also joined in the chorus. We shall first deal with each of them separately and see how they approached it, and then relate the experiences of their participation in it.

The formation of the All-India Kisan (Peasants) Congress

An event of great historical significance and importance was the formation in 1936 of the A.I.K.C. India being a

predominantly agricultural country it was surprising that the formation of such a body had not taken place earlier, bearing in mind that it had proved possible to establish the A.I.T.U.C. as early as 1920. It signified the preoccupation of the left-wing elements with proletarian socialism, and their inability to allocate a precise role that the peasantry could play in the national and social revolutions. True, both the communists and the other left nationalists had embarked upon organising peasants in certain parts of the country during the late twenties and early thirties,¹ but nothing was attempted on an all-India scale. However, the processes of formation of the peasants' organizations that began in the twenties, first spontaneously and then under the local leaders and rural intellectuals, received fresh stimulus during and after the Civil Disobedience Movements. The period of the Civil Disobedience coincided with an acute agrarian crisis, part of the World Economic crisis. The peasants' unrest found expression in a number of economic struggles, some of which were even linked up with the Civil Disobedience Movements, in pursuance of the no-tax campaigns advocated by the National Congress. Many Congressmen participated in these movements and in U.P. there was even a general call for no-tax campaigns. But on the whole, the peasants' struggles retained their economic character and though some of these were not authorised by the Congress, yet the impression always was that these had the sympathy of the Congress. It was with a considerable amount of surprise and bewilderment, therefore, that some Kisan workers and leaders received the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March, 1931 which made little reference to the immediate grievances of the peasantry and the struggles they were engaged in. Even out of the eleven demands that Gandhi had put at the time of launching civil disobedience only two related to peasants, that is, reduction of land taxation by 50 percent and abolition of

1. For the Communists see, W. & P.P. Chapter III; for others see, Transition to Congress Socialism, Chapter IV.

salt-tax. Some even carefully noted that the Pact specifically confined itself to the activities directly connected with the Civil Disobedience. A feeling grew that probably the Congress did not like to countenance any responsibility for these struggles of the peasant masses. Doubts were even raised regarding the genuineness of the sympathy of Congress for the cause of the peasantry. The Fundamental Rights Resolution of the Karachi Congress somewhat allayed these misgivings but while the Resolution affirmed questions of principles it did nothing to indicate how the immediate grievances were to be redressed. It happened, therefore, that the struggle of the peasantry continued in many places even after the Pact, and some of these even assumed serious proportions.

When the Civil Disobedience Movement was resumed in 1932, the peasants' struggles again became intermingled with it and at the same time the number of actions undertaken and the enthusiasm of the peasantry, considerably increased. When the Civil Disobedience movement was again suspended in 1934 without having secured any settlement of the peasants' grievances, the Kisan elements felt once again that they had been let down. Among the radical nationalists and socialists an impression grew that the Congress was more solicitous of the interests of the capitalists and the landed-magnates. Even the moderate elements felt that the Congress was too national and too political to look after the class demands of the peasants. The process of formation of independent organizations of Kisans gathered momentum and numerous peasants' organizations cropped up in different provinces. The continued economic distress simply aided this phenomenal growth of the peasant movement. The Government passed a number of relief measures like the Moneylender's Act (1933) and Relief of Indebtedness Act (1933) in Bengal, Debt Relief Acts in U.P. (1934), Regulation of Accounts Act (1934) in the Punjab etc, but these could not appreciably improve the position and the peasant movement continued to grow. By 1935 there were Peasants' Organisations in Bengal,

Bihar, U.P., C.P., Andhra, Tamilnad, Malabar, Kerala, Gujarat and the Punjab with provincial organizations in U.P. (1935), Behar (1934) and Andhra.

It was at this time that it began to be felt by many that the time was ripe for the formation of an all-India body of Kisans. In 1935 several peasant members belonging to different parties in the Central Legislative Assembly formed a 'Peasant Group of M.L.A.s'. It was an all-India platform created with a view to ventilate the grievances, and formulate the demands of the Kisans. In the words of Ranga, its founder-Secretary, it "sought to create public opinion from the forum of the Legislative Assembly on various peasants' problems."¹ It acted as a watch-dog of peasants' interests in the Assembly.

Meanwhile, the feeling for an all-India body was growing and the South Indian Federation of Peasants and Workers took a lead in this direction, and succeeded in convening an All-India Peasants' and Workers' Conference in October, 1935. But just when this Conference was about to meet some prominent Kisan workers of Bihar issued a statement to the effect that time was not ripe for the formation of an all-India body and that it was more proper to allow Kisan Sabhas to grow from within. The Bihar Kisan Sabha counted among its workers many radicals and socialists, and their action was prompted by certain apprehension regarding the aims of the organization that was to be set up and the methods that it was likely to adopt.² They had a lurking fear that the Conference was being organised by moderate elements and that a liberal programme would be imposed upon the Kisan Movement. They based their belief in the statement of Ranga in which he had emphasized the importance of peasants' organization in view of the impending elections. The socialists argued that peasants did not need a new party to contest elections. Moreover,

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1936. Vol. II, p. 288.

2. N. G. Ranga : *Kisans and Congress*, p. 60.

peasants would not solve their problems by going to Councils.¹

But since the Madras Conference had been convened not to establish an all-India body but to explore its possibility and appoint an organising committee to do the spade work, it met as scheduled under the presidentship of N. G. Ranga and was opened by Mrs. Kamala Debi Chattopadhyaya, the South Indian Congress Socialist leader. It appointed an organising committee with Ranga as Secretary to get in touch with the various provincial organizations. Soon after this conference an agreement developed with J. P. Narain on behalf of the Bihar Kisan leaders and it was decided to convene a more representative all-India gathering of peasants' organizations at Meerut in January, 1936, and coinciding with the second annual conference of the C.S.P. By this time Provincial peasant organizations had also developed in Assam, Kerala, Utkal and Tamil Nad. The Meerut Conference of Kisan representatives, which met under the presidentship of Kamala Debi, recognised the need for the development of an all-India body. It also agreed upon the aims and objects of the Kisan Movement and decided to convene an All-India Kisan Congress at Lucknow in April, 1936, at the time of the annual session of the National Congress. For this purpose it appointed an Organising Committee with Mohanlal Gautam, N. G. Ranga and J. P. Narain as Secretaries. The Committee was also charged with conducting, organising, guiding and helping various Provincial Peasants' Organizations. It was also asked to help, guide and strengthen the peasants' struggles.²

The first All-India Kisan Congress met at Lucknow on the 11th April, 1936 under the presidentship of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, the Bihar Kisan leader. It elected an All-India Kisan Committee with N. G. Ranga, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and Mohanlal Gautam as Secretaries. It also decided to publish an all-India Kisan Bulletin

1. *Congress Socialist*, Vol. I, No. 2, 28th December, 1935, Editorial.
2. *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. II, p. 281.

with Indulal Yagnik as its editor. It fixed September 1 to be observed as Kisan Day.

There was some controversy regarding the name of the all-India body; some elements, including the communists, disliked the name Congress in view of its likeness to the National Congress and favoured the name Federation, but since there was already a precedent in the A.I.T.U.C., it was finally decided to adopt the name All-India Kisan Congress.

The Lucknow session of the Kisan Congress formulated an All-India Kisan Manifesto on the lines of the S.I.K.F. There was some controversy as to the contents of the Manifesto and the radical elements were not satisfied with it. They kept up the pressure and succeeded in adding a preamble to it which contained the demands advocated by the radicals. The preamble to the Manifesto was added at a subsequent meeting of the A.I.K.C. at Bombay, in August, 1936. It was on the lines of the Bihar Kisan Sabha. The Manifesto, as finally adopted, declared the aims and objects of the Kisan Movement which were analogous to those agreed upon at the Meerut Conference. The Manifesto was divided into three parts: Kisan Charter of Rights, Fundamental Rights and Immediate Demands. The National Congress was requested to adopt these in its programme.

Under the Charter of Rights were enumerated the objects of the movement and the main tasks that faced it. Regarding the objects of the movement, the Manifesto declared that "the object of the Kisan Movement is to secure complete freedom from economic exploitation and the achievement of full economic and political power to the peasants and workers and other exploiting classes."¹ It also declared that the main task "shall be organization of peasants to fight for their immediate political and economic demands in order to prepare them for their emancipa-

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. II, p. 280.

tion from every form of political exploitation.”¹ The objects for which the Kisan Congress committed itself is noteworthy, for it declared itself in favour of ending the political and economic exploitation not only of the peasants but also that of the workers and this evidently had been done to assuage the feelings of those Socialist elements who were insisting that no antipathy should develop between the peasants and workers. In consonance with this spirit the Kisans, for the first time, participated in the May Day celebration of 1936, and the workers supported the Kisan Day of September 1.

There was another clause in the charter by which the Kisan Congress bound itself to the national movement. It read : “The Kisan movement stands for the achievement of ultimate economic and political power for the producing masses through its active participation in the national struggle.”² The Manifesto specifically declared that the objectives were not realizable under the existing political set-up but the peasants must fight to secure them, for in that way they would learn that the system of government must go and thus the peasants’ struggle would merge with the national struggle.

Under Fundamental Demands it came forward with demands for the abolition of the Zamindari (landlordism) and for the vesting of all rights of ownership of lands in the cultivators. It demanded the abolition of the existing system of land revenue. Peasants, it said, must be completely relieved from all liability to pay their old debts. Landless peasants and those having less than five acres of land, it demanded, must be provided with land to cultivate on the basis of cooperative farming.

Its minimum demands were :

1. Concillation of all arrears of rent and revenue.
2. Abolition of Land Revenue Assessment and rent from uneconomic holding.
3. Reduction by at least 50% of rent and revenue.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

4. Immediate grant of the right of permanent cultivation.
5. Graduated income tax, death duty and inheritance tax upon all agricultural revenue of landlords and merchants.
6. Money-lender to be licensed.
7. Minimum wage for agricultural workers.
8. Fair price for sugar cane, etc.
9. Development of irrigation and drainage facilities.
10. Establishment of village panchayat.
11. Adult Franchise.

With regard to the New Constitution the Kisan Congress declared its opposition and observed that a constitution, in which the vested interests were protected by so many safeguards, could not be suitable for the peasants' masses. It demanded the convening of a Constituent Assembly based on adult franchise and also declared itself in favour of an uni-Cameral legislature.

The Second All-India Kisan Conference met at Faizpur at the time of the annual session of the National Congress. Kisans in thousands attended it. The growing influence of Kisan Sabhas, undoubtedly, found reflection in the Agrarian Programme adopted by the National Congress at Faizpur. At this stage the Kisan Congress published its draft constitution and, amidst controversy, adopted the Red Flag as its flag. The Kisan Congress made rapid strides as is evidenced by the fact that by the time of its third session at Comilla in May, 1938, its membership rose to 6,00,000. At this session it changed its name to All-India Kisan Sabha and adopted a more radical programme. By the time of the fourth session of the Sabha at Gaya in April, 1939, its membership rose to 8,00,000.

Meetings, marches, conferences and demonstrations were the normal patterns of mass activity indulged in by Kisan Sabhas.

Meanwhile, the Congress Right Wing was viewing the whole development with suspicion. It generally maintained that the Congress itself was, in a sense, a peasants'

organization and as such there was no need of a separate organization. The Congress membership consisted predominantly of peasants. It argued that the Congress had always whole-heartedly championed the demands of the peasantry and, in the main, depended for its strength upon its ability to reflect and gain their support.¹ The Congress was pledged to alleviate the sufferings of the peasants. The Economic Rights Resolution of the Karachi Congress and the agrarian programme of the Faizpur Congress were expressions of it.

But this argument did not find favour even with left Congressmen. Jawaharlal Nehru, for example, supported the idea of having separate organizations of the Kisans. According to him the Congress was—and had to be—a national organization and hence there was need for the organizations of kisans and workers to defend their class interests. He admitted that the Congress had in the past stood by peasants. But, in spite of all this, the Congress remained—and had to remain—a national organization and it could not always represent the functional or class interests of peasants.² But he was also of the view that they should not develop in any spirit of rivalry to the National Congress, and try not only to obtain a proper recognition from the Congress but also to establish a fitting place for themselves in it, through the method of functional representation.

Those Kisan leaders, who acknowledged the pivotal position of the Congress as a national organization and were primarily associated with it, but who also felt the necessity of kisan organizations, advanced various arguments for their needs. Firstly, the Congress was a multi-class organization and the peasant, being lost in a mixed gathering, was not able fully to assert himself in the national organization. He, thus, needed an organization of his own class to give him preliminary

1. *Interview of the Kisan representatives with Rajendra Prasad, the then Congress President. quoted by Ranga in Modern Indian Peasant, p. 3.*
2. *Quoted by Ranga : Kisans & Congress, p. 78.*

training. Secondly, being a national organization, the Congress was not in a position to accept the basic demands of peasants. The Kisan organization was, therefore, necessary to exert revolutionary pressure on the Congress to adopt more and more the demands of peasants. Thirdly, in several places Congress Committees were controlled by Zamindar (landlord) elements and, therefore, not only the resolutions of the Congress could not be implemented, but the peasants even did not receive any assistance and their grievances went unredressed for want of advocacy. In such places Kisan Sabha was a necessity.¹

The Kisan leaders also stated that the Congress had failed to espouse the cause of Kisans to the fullest extent and that it could not stand by the Kisans as their champions. They were, nevertheless, at pains to make it clear that they were not organising in any spirit of rivalry to the Congress. They maintained that they belonged to the national movement and were proud of it.

Thus, Ranga, in his Presidential Address to the Andhra Provincial Ryots Conference, 1936, said: "Our peasants have helped in building up the great Congress and are prepared to carry forward its great fight for complete independence with all their resources if only it chooses to champion their class demands in an unequivocal manner, and give the go-by to its present predominantly capitalist policy."²

The Kisan leaders argued that the Kisan and the political movements were interdependent and that the strength of one was adding strength to the other. They maintained that peasants were the weakest link in the national organization. It was, therefore, essential that a political movement be developed so as to draw its main strength from the peasantry. By organising the Kisans, they said, they were adding strength to the Congress. "The I.N.C. stands to gain everything and nothing to lose by its conscious and whole-hearted alliance with workers and peasants", so observed Ranga.

1. *Narendra Deva : Socialism and National Revolution, pp. 42-43.*
2. *N. G. Ranga : Modern Indian Peasant, p. 10.*

While the extremists and over-enthusiasts on both sides, occasionally took a narrow sectional view and provided irritants, sober sections in both the organizations counselled patience, calm and dispassion. They held that the Kisan Sabha should not enter into rivalry with the Congress. They regarded the two organizations as complementary, each adding strength to the other.¹ They urged the Kisan Sabhas to enter into friendly relations with the local Congress organizations and to carry on their activities in cooperation with them as far as possible. At that stage the assistance given by the Congress Committees was valuable. Kisan Sabhas were primarily organised to secure the economic rights of peasants and as their basic grievances could not be eradicated without the end of colonial exploitation, peasants should own the National Congress, which was fighting for national freedom, as their own organisation. As the Congress also could not gain its objective without mass action on a national scale, it needed the services of class conscious militant peasants. The Congress, according to them, must change its mentality so that the Kisan's problem might become its concern.

A cause of friction between the Congress and the Kisan organization was the belief among many Congressmen that the Kisan Sabhas stood for violence. The Kisan leaders took pains to point out that the Kisan Sabhaites were no more believers in violence than orthodox Congressmen.²

The controversy thus went on. Ultimately, the Hari-pura Congress (1938) recognised the right of Kisans to organise themselves in peasant unions but it also declared that while fully recognising the right of Kisan Sabhas, the Congress could not associate itself with any activities which were incompatible with the basic principles of the Congress.

The continued controversy with the Congress as to the desirability or otherwise of a separate peasants' organiza-

1. *Narendra Deva, Ibid, p. 44.*

2. *N. G. Ranga : Peasants and Congress. Page IV.*

tion was not the only hurdle in the way of a progressively rapid growth of the Kisan Congress. Objectively speaking peasantry is a heterogeneous class. It has many subdivisions among itself, whose interests are sometimes conflicting. The rich peasants and landlords, the middle peasants, and the agricultural labourer and the semi-proletariat of the village often pursue different aims. The last is the most oppressed and exploited rural class and suffers from worst kind of economic and social bondage. A further complicating factor was that there was no uniform land and revenue systems in the country and agrarian conditions differed from province to province. Moreover, the different elements in the Kisan Congress, that is the communists, the socialists, the left Congressmen, and the moderates, differed as to the aims and objects of the Kisan movement and the tactics that were to be adopted. An ideal posited by the moderates and many left Congressmen was that of Kisan-Mazdoor Raj (Peasants' and Workers' rule) but the communist elements and to a lesser extent the Congress Socialists looked askance at this goal. To them the difficulties of reconciling the concept of Kisan-Majdoor Raj with that of Socialism were wide enough. The conception of socialism was that of society in which the ownership of means of production, distribution and exchange are socially owned. The ultimate stage of socialism precludes all remnants of private property whether in land or in other means of production. The conception of Kisan-Majdoor Raj, on the contrary, was democratically (in a liberal sense) conceived. Behind the vague idealising of the Kisan-Mazdoor Raj, as expressed in the writings and speeches of certain Kisan Sabha leaders, was the hard core of the retention of peasant proprietorship. Kisan-Majdoor Raj meant, in fact, the rule of peasants and workers. Leaving aside, for the time being, this rule of workers which was later incorporated as an associated idea, Kisan Raj as conceived by the Kisan Sabha leaders, pictured a democratically conceived society wherein peasants, free of all inhibitions of landlordism and associated maladies, were

to retain their ownership of land and were to regain "effective power in modern society and control over the state."¹

Indeed the conception of Kisan-Majdoor Raj was conceived negatively amidst the background of the exploitative rule and dominance of landlords and money-lenders and was contrived to catch the imagination of peasants—and even workers—by pointing to a state wherein there would be no rule of landlords and money-lenders, and instead, there would be rule of peasants and workers. As such it was always a vague ideal, inspiration for which came both from the ideals of the Panchayat Raj system of the ancient village communes prevalent in India before the advent of the British and even envisaged by Gandhi and the general ideals of socialism, but wherein concrete formulations were always lacking.

But sworn of these vague idealizings the ideal of the Kisan-Majdoor Raj was that of a 'progressive and democratic political ideal' based upon the 'democratic partnership of all the peasants, workers, artisans, professionals and intellectuals'.

Herein there was no conception of social ownership. Indeed the peasants were to develop and retain their own class-consciousness and political-consciousness so that they might "insist upon their own effective leadership in any political combination,"² if they were to avoid being 'sandwiched between the all powerful communistic proletariat on the one side and intellectuals and professionals on the other.'³

Peasants were not to be subordinate to any other class, or to its rule, though to entrench their position and to regain their initiative they were to 'ally themselves with the artisans and proletariat and also with professionals and intellectuals'⁴ but this was to be on an equal basis. Some-

1. Ranga : *Revolutionary Peasants*, p. 1.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid*, p. 3.

times even the conception of 'peasantry as the central force' was advocated.¹

Even as early as 1935-36, this slogan of Kisan Raj alarmed both the communists and the socialists, because this ideal (a) neglected both the proletariat and the agricultural workers and (b) gave incentive to private ownership. Narendra Dev saw in it the danger of peasantism which looked at all questions from the narrow and sectional view-point of the peasant class alone, thus believing in rural democracy which meant a democracy of peasant proprietors. But this was the outlook of middle peasants.² He wanted the main mass of the peasantry to be educated in the spirit of socialism. This ideal also ignored the landless peasants and agricultural labourers.

It was because of this that some of them had initially objected to the calling of the First All-India Peasant Workers' Conference in Madras in 1935. It was also due to the objection of these elements that the ideal of the Kisan-Mazdoor Raj could not be incorporated in the constitution of the A.I.K.C. at the time of its inception.

It was also because of this that, though this ideal of Kisan-Mazdoor Raj was being popularised among non-socialist and non-communist Kisan workers, yet this ideal was never placed before the Kisan Congress even for consideration till the Gaya session of the Kisan Congress (April, 1939).

But the very fact that some sections wanted the Sabha to adopt this ideal was clear enough indication that ideological conflicts were maturing. After a considerable amount of controversy, the Gaya session, for the first time, put the ideal on its banner. Another cause of disunity was that the Kisan Sabhas were mostly concerned with peasants and not with agricultural labourers. This was sometimes taken advantage of by the opponents of the Kisan Congress who, in addition, also brought in caste, communal

1. Ranga : *Kisans and Communists*. p. 6.

2. *Op. Cit.*, p. 51.

and religious considerations to divide the peasants. In fact, when the Khet-Mazdoor Sabha (Agricultural Labour Union) was created in Bihar in 1937, it passed a no-confidence resolution in the Kisan Sabha and this, despite the fact that Kisan Sabhas not only never exhibited any hostility towards agricultural labour but even favoured their growth and advancement. But the Kisan leaders also warned against developing ultra-left tendencies. The A.I.K.S. at its Comilla Conference (1938) welcomed such organizations and invited the Khet-Mazdoor Sabha to affiliate to the all-India body.

Despite these differences all the sections composing the Kisan Congress worked together. Among others, unity was provided by the opposition (in the initial stages) of the Rightist leaders of the Indian National Congress to class organizations of peasants and their criticism of the various aspects of the policy and programme of the Kisan Congress. A further cementing factor was the common belief in favour of a United Anti-Imperialist Front. In keeping with this spirit, the Kisan leaders demanded a united front of the Kisan Congress, and the National Congress and all other anti-imperialist elements and asked for the right of the A.I.K.C. for collective affiliation to the National Congress.

Towards United Trade Unionism

By far the most important development during this period was the unity achieved in the Trade Union field. The two splits in the Trade Unions had considerably weakened the authority, prestige and the organizational strength of the All India Trade Union Congress. In the years following the splits, the workers, faced with the worsening economic conditions, rationalisation and wage-cuts, resorted to a number of strikes, the most notable among which were : the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Strike (1930), the Bengal Jute Workers' Strike (1930), the Bombay Dock Workers' Strike (1934), the Calcutta Dock Workers' Strike (1934-35) and the Bombay Textile Workers' Strike (1934). The experiences born out of these revealed the limitations

of working under a split leadership and of speaking with a divided voice. In particular, the experiences of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Strike were regarded as most disappointing. Split into rival sections, the Trade Unions could no longer command their former prestige, and their hands were weakened in collective bargaining with the employers. Need for unity, therefore, was realized soon by all sections in the Trade Unions. A feeling dawned upon them all that if the Trade Unions were to regain their former power and authority, they all must be reunited.

This desire for unity, however, could not immediately be translated into action as the fundamental differences that had caused the splits still persisted. The need, clearly, was for somebody to start negotiations and to work out a common platform of unity. Initiation in this direction was taken almost simultaneously by two trade unions, the A. I. Railwaymen's Federation, representing the moderates, and the Bombay Girni Kamgar Union, representing the radicals. Working independently of each other, they produced two separate platforms of unity.

The A.I.R.F. convened a unity conference in Bombay, in May, 1931, where it was resolved to prepare a draft proposal for unity. At its second session in Madras in July, 1932, the unity conference came to an almost unanimous decision on the following principles on the basis of which unity was to be sought.

“ (1) A trade union is an organ of class struggle; its basic task, therefore, is to organise the workers for advancing and defending their rights and interests; and although collective bargaining is the necessary implication of a trade union and although in the transitional period to socialism, negotiations, representations and other methods of collective bargaining must remain an integral part of trade union activities, as labour and capital can't be reconciled in the capitalistic system.

“ (2) That cooperation with the employing classes is not excluded if it is necessary in the interests of the working classes.

“ (3) That the Indian trade union movement shall support and actively participate in the struggle for India’s political freedom from the point of view of the working class. This would mean the establishment of a socialist state and, during the interval, socialisation and nationalisation of all means of production and distribution as far as possible.

“ (4) The Indian Trade Union Congress stands for :

- (a) Freedom of the Press.
- (b) Freedom of Speech.
- (c) Freedom of Assembly.
- (d) Freedom of Organization.

“ (5) The Trade Union Congress shall send delegates to the International Labour Conference held under the auspices of the League of Nations.

“ (6) The methods of obtaining the objective of the trade union movement shall be peaceful, legitimate and democratic.”¹

The conference drafted a Constitution on the basis of these principles and invited both the A.I.T.U.C. and the All India Trades Union Federation to a special unity conference to be held at Delhi in February, 1933. But neither of these two organizations were prepared to accept the draft constitution. To the leaders of the A.I.T.U.C. the draft, in so far as it accepted the principles of class struggle and workers’ participation in the political movement for freedom, was an advance upon the ‘economicism’ of the Federation leaders, but it did not go far enough as it left vague the concept of class struggle and did not elucidate the methods of participation of the trade unions in the national movement. Moreover, it was conspicuously silent regarding the question of international affiliation and made provisions for sending delegates to the I.L.O. To the moderates of the Federation it seemed to offer too big a stride to be undertaken.

1. *Report of the First Conference of the National Trades Union Federation, 1933.*

After the failure of the special unity conference those elements in the trade unions who favoured the draft, formed another all-India organization, namely, The National Federation of Labour, and thus, ironically enough, the unity conference, far from achieving unity, added one more to the three already existing central organizations. However, the A.I.T.U.F., at a special Convention, held in Calcutta in April, 1933, accepted the unity draft and two Federations amalgamated to form the National Trades Union Federation. With this the process of consolidation of the moderate trade unions was complete.

The aims and objects of the new Federation were declared to be the establishment of a Socialist State in India, while their immediate aim before such a State was established was to endeavour to ameliorate the economic and social conditions of the working classes. It committed itself to "support and actively participate in the struggle for India's freedom from the point of view of the working classes." It was a clear break with the old apolitical outlook and may rightly be regarded as a product of the 'split era' and as a concession to the left-wing. The Federation also pledged itself to secure and maintain for the workers, freedom of speech, press and association; the right to strike and the right to work.¹

The Girni Kamgar Union, prompted by the same desire for unity, produced a Platform of Unity which declared that 'a trade union is a class organization' and that 'the interests of workers are irreconcilable with the capitalists'.² It made it obligatory upon the trade unions to participate in the political movement and declared: "The Indian movement shall support and actively participate in the struggle for national freedom, from the point of view of the working class. They don't believe that any compromise between the foreign and Indian bourgeoisie for responsible government or Dominion Status can even change

1. *Report of the First Conference of N.T.U.F.*, 1933.
2. *Indian Annual Register*, 1933, Vol. II. p. 407.

the conditions of workers substantially. The basic political demand of the Indian Working Class is the termination of the Imperialist domination, overthrow of Capitalism and socialisation of the means of production."¹ It desired that the Working Class should take its rightful place as the leader and organiser of national revolution. The unity platform contained immediate demands of workers on the basis of which their economic struggles were to be led. These included, eight-hour day, a minimum wage, weekly payment of wages, one month's leave, and unemployment, sickness, old-age and maternity insurance.

The Federation was not prepared to come to unity terms on the basis of the Platform. The Platform, however, provided a meeting ground for the radical sections in the trade unions. The A.I.T.U.C., at its 12th annual session held in Madras in September, 1932, accepted this Platform of Unity and desired all other sections to be united on that basis. The 13th session of the A.I.T.U.C. held at Cawnpur in December, 1933, reaffirmed its acceptance and on the basis of its principles, adopted the Fundamental Rights of the Indian Working Class. It also took two important decisions :

- (a) To organise a general strike of the textile workers, and
- (b) to establish an All-India Political Party of the Working Class.²

In pursuance of this latter decision an All-India Working Class Political Conference took place at Jubbulpore in April, 1934. It confirmed the Cawnpur decision that the workers must actively participate in the national struggle from the point of view of the Working Class and that, therefore, the A.I.T.U.C. must have its political counterpart in the form of a Working Class Political Party.³ But

1. *Ibid.*

2. *The Report of the 13th Session of the AITUC, also see, India in 1933-34, Govt. Publication, pp. 3411.*

3. *For full account of their Conference see, the Report of the A.I.T.U.C., 1934.*

the project never materialised, probably because the C.S.P. was formed in May, 1934 and also because its other participants, like the Royists, had not fully made up their minds about it.¹

During the Bombay Textile Workers' Strike in April, 1934, the R.T.U.C. and the A.I.T.U.C. worked together in unison and it was in course of this strike that a fresh demand arose for unity between these two sections. Meanwhile, the formation of the C.S.P. in May, 1934 gave an all-round stimulus to the unity efforts. Largely at the initiative of this Party a United Front in the trade union field, with the purpose of having joint action on specific issues, was agreed upon in 1934 between the A.I.C.S.P., the A.I.T.U.C., the N.T.U.F. and the R.T.U.C. The specific issues listed were : the danger of another war, the Government repression, the Joint Parliamentary Committee Report and such other issues as might arise from time to time. The nature of joint action was to be the holding of meetings and demonstrations, the observing of 'days' and anniversaries, issuing of statements and literature, etc. It was also agreed that there would be joint action only if certain conditions were fulfilled. These were :

- “ (1) There shall be no mutual criticism in speeches or by distribution of leaflets, at joint functions.
- (2) There shall be no abuse of each other, no imputations on the motives or honesty of either Party.
- (3) Before every joint action there shall be a joint agreement regarding the terms of resolutions and slogans, carrying of banners and flags, and distribution of leaflets and literature.
- (4) There shall be no advocacy of violence or non-violence by either Party at joint functions.
- (5) At joint functions there shall be no appeal for support to either Party or to enrol members or

1. For this point see this chapter, section, Roy and the Roy Group.

to draw any exclusive advantage to either Party."1

There was an additional condition agreed upon between the A.I.C.S.P. and the R.T.U.C. by which each Party reserved to itself the right of genuine and honest criticism of the political principles and policies of the other from its independent platform.

The A.I.T.U.C. and the R.T.U.C. were now seeing eye to eye on many issues and both these organizations amalgamated into one comprehensive A.I.T.U.C. at the 14th annual session of the A.I.T.U.C., held at Calcutta in April, 1937. The conditions of unity were recognition of class struggle, the promotion of internal trade union democracy, no foreign affiliation, and principle of one union for each industry. The United Trade Union Congress started its work with a joint Manifesto which called for a United Front to prepare for Direct Action. It enunciated the basic principles of free India :

- (I) Transfer of all power to the oppressed and exploited classes.
- (II) Abolition of Native States and parasitic landlordism.
- (III) Freedom of peasantry from all exploitation.
- (IV) Nationalisation of land, public utilities, mineral resources, banks and all other key-industries.
- (V) Minimum wage, limited hours of work, and insurance against old age, sickness and unemployment.²

It also spoke of the necessity of bringing alliance of workers and peasants, and of establishing contact with the C.S.P. It was critical of the leadership of the National Congress but held that it was suicidal to denounce the Congress. It issued a fervent appeal to the N.T.U.F. to unite on the same principles which had brought these two organizations together.

1. Quoted by Masani in *C.P. of India*, p. 55.

2. *Report of the 14th Session of the AITUC, 1935.*

Thus, by 1935, the Indian trade unions were left with only two central organizations : the N.T.U.F. consisting of the moderates, and the A.I.T.U.C. comprising all left elements, the Congress Socialists, the communists, the Royists and all other left nationalists. But dividing these two there was a wide gulf hampering all attempts at unity. In common both were agreed in having an overwhelming desire for unity, and both accepted the principle of workers' participation in the freedom movement. The constitution of both, for example, said that the workers "shall support and actively participate in the struggle for India's political freedom from the point of view of the working class", but they disagreed as to what this participation meant or how this was to be realized. The moderates never elaborated this point. Sometimes they spoke of the idea of organising an All-India Political Party of the Working Class,¹ but it remained merely an idea. They didn't even like the trade union movement to bind itself to the chariot wheel of the National Congress. But by workers' participation in the freedom movement the radicals meant their active participation in the national movement as embodied by the National Congress and for this purpose they not only advocated the principle of collective affiliation of the trade unions to the National Congress but also asked the Congress to accept the demands of the working classes.² They went even further. They thought the National Congress leadership to be reactionary and expressed their intention of changing it. Workers, they thought, must be mobilised and organised on a mass basis and they must work in alliance with the peasantry and other anti-imperialist forces in a United Front.

Similarly, they both were opposed to the New Constitution. The N.T.U.F. maintained that it was a 'device to perpetuate imperialism', and that it was 'reactionary and

1. *Speech of Jamna Das Mehta to Second Session of NTUF, 1935, in Report.*
2. *Shastri's Presidential address to the AITUC, 1935.*

retrograde in character.¹ The A.I.T.U.C. described it as a 'slave' constitution.² But they differed as to what should be done in regard to it, though both spoke of 'wrecking' it. The policy of the Federation was that of the liberals who thought that the constitution could be opposed solely by the methods of parliamentarism. But according to the A.I.T.U.C. leaders the attitude should be exclusively one of "irreconcilable hostility". They accepted parliamentarism as a method of 'wrecking' the constitution but they were opposed to the acceptance of offices under the constitution. Their main emphasis was on extra-parliamentary activities. They demanded a Constituent Assembly based on universal adult franchise. The Resolution of the 15th session of the A.I.T.U.C., 1936, said : "The T.U.C. declares that the only form of state which will ensure the freest possible democracy for the masses is the democratic state based on an armed nation, a state which abolishes a standing army, bureaucracy and police, and replaces this by a national militia and elected officials responsive and responsible to the masses. The T.U.C. decides to popularise this kind of state as embodying the democracy of toilers and considers as the main effective method of mobilising the working class for struggle against the Constitution."³

Both bodies accepted trade unions as organs of class struggle but differed as to what this class struggle implied. To the leftists class struggle meant 'class war' involving direct action; to the moderates it meant a 'peaceful, legitimate and democratic' struggle. The constitution of the N.T.U.F. maintained that though 'Labour and Capital can't be reconciled within the Capitalist system', cooperation between the two was desirable if it was in the interests of labour. But the constitution of the A.I.T.U.C., on the other hand, maintained : "A trade union is an organ of class struggle whose basic task is organization of workers in a particular trade or industry for defending and advancing

1. *Report of First Conference.*

2. *See, Report of the AITUC, 1936.*

3. *Report.*

their interests, which precludes any attempt at reconciliation of the interests of Capital and Labour or the fostering of friendly relations between employers and employees."

Similarly, there were differences regarding international affiliation and the sending of delegates to the I.L.O. The N.T.U.F. was affiliated to the Amsterdam International and used to send delegates to the I.L.O. But the A.I.T.U.C. was opposed to sending delegates to the I.L.O. and on the question of International affiliation it thought that in view of the differences between different sections it was wise not to affiliate to any outside body.

But the urge for unity was so great that, despite these differences, prominent representatives of both sections like N. M. Joshi, Shiva Rao, H. N. Shastri and R. S. Ruikar, etc., met at Delhi in March, 1935, with a view to exploring some basis for unity. They could not, however, arrive at any agreed formula and in a joint statement issued at the end of the meeting, they observed that differences, fundamental in character, stood in the way of union. They concluded that the split had had serious and adverse effects on the functioning of the trade unions and that unity must be arrived at. They suggested, therefore, that even if unity was not immediately possible a beginning might be made by setting up a Joint Committee consisting of ten members each of the two sections to evolve a joint programme of action on specific issues. This created a favourable atmosphere for unity.

In August, 1935, a joint conference of the A.I.T.U.C. and the N.T.U.F. was held at Nagpur but here too no agreements could be arrived at. The A.I.T.U.C. was prepared to send delegates to the I.L.O. but on the question of international affiliation it was adamant. However, these were not the real barriers to unity, though they were often openly stated to be so. The real reasons were that on questions both of strikes and political struggles the Federation leaders wanted the whip hand. They had not forgotten the experiences of the late twenties when they were left in a position of minority. They, therefore, insisted upon a 3/4th

majority for any decision on strike and political struggle in the United Union. It is for this reason also that they resisted an immediate structural unity and favoured the development of unity by stages. The Trade Union Congress leaders replied that they were not prepared to concede more than a 2|3rds majority for deciding these issues. Thus, there were proposals and counter-proposals at Nagpur and what finally emerged was a Joint Labour Board consisting of the representatives of the two bodies, and it was also decided that the same principle might be extended to the Provinces. The Boards were to coordinate the activities of the two sections. Besides, joint meetings, demonstrations and actions were organised by the two sections against the Constitution, against ban on militant workers' organizations, etc. The Board never functioned quite satisfactorily and the only purpose it served was that it kept an unity atmosphere which eventually led to complete unity in 1938, when, at a conference at Nagpur, the N.T.U.F. affiliated to the A.I.T.U.C. with equal representation of the two sections on the governing body of the Congress. With this the consolidation of the trade unions was complete. In this story of splits in the trade union movement, and of the attempts to heal them up by creating forms of unity, there is significance in the fact that the lines of division were political in nature. In the post-war period the trade unions came to be wholly organised on political lines.

However, the A.I.T.U.C. became a champion of the United Front and it entered into an agreement with the A.I.C.S.P. and in an understanding with the A.I.K.C. for that purpose. From its platform also the patent slogans such as struggle against the new constitution, against office acceptance, the demand for a Constituent Assembly based upon universal adult suffrage, dangers of imperialist war came to be raised. It enthusiastically favoured participation in the national struggle, acknowledged the nationalist character of the Congress but urged for collective affiliation of the A. I. T. U. C.

to it with a view to broaden the national struggle. The new Trade Union Congress declared as its goal the abolition of capitalism and establishment of socialism and for the attainment of national independence as a condition precedent for the same. As an immediate goal it raised its voice in favour of the immediate, burning demands of workers and peasants.

Roy and the Roy Group

We left Roy a convict, undergoing a six years' term of imprisonment in the Bareilly Central Prison.¹ During his absence, the banner of Royism was held aloft by a few of his followers in the trade unions. Evidently, suffering from the lack of his guidance, their line of action was not always clear or consistent. They frequently opposed the policy of the communists, only to cooperate with them on other occasions; as for example, when they joined a call for a General Strike in 1934 and more specifically during the Bombay Textile Workers' Strike.² They also cooperated with the left nationalists and socialists in the trade unions and agreed with them, rather than with the communists, on many political issues. They acquired some influence in the A.I.T.U.C. At one stage they even planned, in association with some other left and trade union elements, to form an independent All-India Working Class Party but it could not materialise, mostly because Roy was still opposed to the formation of an independent working class party over and above the existing Communist Party. He had still the hope that the C.I. would return to the old

1. Chapter IV.

2. This Chapter, towards United Trade Unionism.

line and that all opposition communists would be readmitted.¹

It was at this stage that the All-India Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934. In the absence of any declared view of their leader about it, the Royists not only did not oppose its formation but even greeted its formation with enthusiasm. At the Bombay Conference of the C.S.P., they had concentrated on putting the C.A. demand in the forefront of the party's programme and as the members of the C.S.P. agreed with it, this was readily done. At the invitation of the C.S.P. most of them joined it and many of them even took a prominent part in the activities of the Party. From this time onwards, till the Meerut Conference of the C.S.P., the only vital criticism offered by the Roy group was in respect of the main task of the Party. The original plan of action of the Party had talked of persuading the Congress to accept the objects and the programme of the Party, which meant persuading the Congress to accept even Socialist programme. However, by the time of the Meerut Conference the C.S.P. itself deleted this from its programme. Really there were more fundamental differences which appeared as Roy's views in the form of letters to the C.S.P.,² wherein he expressed his disagreements with the formation of a Socialist Party inside the National Congress, though, he said, he was not opposed to

1. *In this connection we have a significant statement from Roy, in the footnote to a letter from Prison (dated June 10, 1933) which he wrote to his wife in Europe. He says : "I was opposed to the Communists, opposed to the then official policy of the Communist International, and subsequently expelled, establishing a separate organisation. I advocated their working just like members of the Communist Party, carrying on propaganda according to their views, and advising the supporters of these views to join the official Communist Party. I was of opinion that, pursuing that policy, official Communists expelled from the official parties would thus be able to extend their influence in the rank and file of the parties, and eventually change their policy."* M. N. Roy : *Fragments of a Prisoner's Diary*, Vol. III, p. 58.
2. *Written from Prison these consist of three letters, the first was dated May, 1934 and the last one, dated February, 1936. They were later published, see, M. N. Roy.: Letters to the C.S.P.*

the formation of a real Socialist Party, that is, a Communist Party, outside and independent of the National Congress. The existing stage of revolution in India, he observed, was the stage of Bourgeois Democratic Revolution.¹ The nationalist movement was a multi-class movement and as such it must be carried on under the banner of a multi-class organization. The National Congress was such an organization historically created by the Indian people for the accomplishment of the national revolution. Therefore, the place of socialists, communists and all other left elements was inside it, but they must enter that organization not as socialists or communists but as nationalists, as cent per cent Congressmen.

The point at issue, according to Roy, was that however correct it was to regard the National Congress as a historically forged weapon of the Indian people for democratic freedom, it had always been under leadership which discountenanced revolution and, therefore, the capture of the Congress machinery by the left elements must be an item of the Indian revolution. But such a task could only be carried on under the banner of national revolution, not Socialism. The plan to convert the Congress as such to Socialism was Utopian. There were large elements inside it which did not stand for Socialism, though they stood for democratic freedom. Therefore, the plan to work as organised Socialist Party inside the Congress was not only going considerably ahead of those whom it was intended to lead but it was also a blunder tactically as it would be playing into the hands of the Right. This would surely lead to the isolation of the Socialists. "The present political situation", he said, "demands not the organization of a Socialist Party inside the Congress, a party which by the logic of the relation of forces will inevitably be an impotent and isolated group, but the capture of the Con-

1. He said he did not exclude the possibility of the anti-imperialist struggle 'overstepping the bounds of nationalism' before it was successful but he wanted not to prepare on that assumption. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 53.

gress as such by the radical national revolutionary elements.”¹

He admitted that even in the anti-imperialist struggle a genuine Socialist Party was of ‘decisive political importance,² but such a party could not openly bid for the leadership of the Congress and, therefore, it must be outside it. Inside the Congress it should only work as a revolutionary nucleus, as an alternative leadership, around which the national democratic revolutionary forces would be mobilised for the capture of the leadership of the Congress. “The revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat (the genuine socialists, that is, the communists), organised in their own party outside and independent of the Congress, will remain in the Congress as the most active members of the left wing, and through it, influence, change and guide the policy of the Congress. Eventually the radical left wing, under proletarian hegemony, exercised through its socialist (communist) members (who may be the leaders) will come to predominate the Congress, and the Congress will adopt the programme of the democratic national revolution. That will be the beginning of the decisive stage of the

1. Opt. Cit.. p. 16.

2. He wrote : “A political party of the working class is an indispensably necessary factor of the Indian Revolution even in its initial bourgeois democratic stage.” (Opt. cit p. 32). But he added : “The object of the Socialist Party of the working class is not to persuade the Congress to adopt a Socialist programme, but to wield it as the instrument in the struggle for national independence.”

anti-imperialist struggle.”¹ The struggle for the leadership of the Congress must take place not under the flag of Socialism but of democratic national revolution.

According to Roy, to carry out these complicated tasks the left wing must also remain inside the Congress, advance a programme of democratic freedom before the Congress rank and file and try to rally them under it. He criticised the idea of not accepting office under the Congress. He himself produced such a ‘programme of national democratic revolution’ which included, transfer of ownership of land to the peasant, relief to the peasantry (so as to leave it with at least 80 per cent of the gross produce), a legally guaranteed minimum wage, extensive public works and industrial undertakings by the State, public ownership of modern means of transportation, State control over banking and credit, social insurance, etc.² He was opposed to the new constitution but maintained that the best way of ‘fighting’ it was to raise the slogan for a Constituent Assembly. He stood for democratising the Constitution of

1. *Op. Cit.* p. 17. It is to be noted here that Roy was allocating the role only of hegemony and not of leadership to the proletariat in the national movement. Here he disagreed both with the Communists and the view of the C.S.P. in early years.

Note also his use consistently of the term ‘Socialist’ as synonym of ‘Communist’. In fact, he was also opposed to the organisation of a ‘Socialist’ Party as distinct from a ‘Communist’ Party. He held that a ‘Socialist’ Party would be a reformist party on the model of Social-Democratic Parties in Western Europe but, according to him, India needed a revolutionary party, i.e., a Communist Party. He maintained: “Socialist Parties throughout the World deviated from the path which must be travelled for reaching their proposed goal.” “Socialist Parties no longer stand for the establishment of a classless society.” “Today, Socialism means the repudiation of revolutionary struggle against Capitalism and, ‘ipso facto’, against Imperialism.” Therefore, even when stating that he was not opposed to a ‘Socialist’ Party outside the Congress, he said it must be a ‘genuine’ Socialist Party. The Congress Socialists themselves were claiming that their Party was a Marxist one, but in that case, argued Roy, why were they taking the term ‘Socialist’? This meant that they wanted to differentiate themselves from the ‘Communist’ Party. Roy averred that over years he had objected to the formation of a reformist Labour Party in India.

2. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 66-68 (Appendix II).

the National Congress so that the masses might be drawn to it, and though he favoured the collective affiliation of workers, peasants and other mass organizations to it, yet he did not make it an article of faith.

Such being the attitude of Roy towards the C.S.P., differences between the Royists inside the C.S.P. and the other members of it became marked at the time of the second C.S.P. conference at Meerut (1936). Before the Meerut Congress there was an alleged circular of the Royists to liquidate the C.S.P. However, this was denied by the Royists. The Royists themselves were divided and in the end they again agreed to work inside the C.S.P. and to develop it as a Marxist Party.¹ What ultimately moved them in this direction was the fact that on many issues such as the new constitution, the programme and leadership of the Congress, changes in the Congress Constitution, etc., they found a unity of outlook with the C.S.P. However, the relation between the Royists and others inside the C.S.P. remained in an uneasy state of balance till Roy was released in November, 1936.

The release of Roy was marked by an alround enthusiasm and wild expectations were entertained of this 'legendary revolutionary'. In his address to the Faizpur Congress Nehru greeted 'Comrade Roy', the Congress Socialist of November 21, 1936 welcomed Roy. Immediately after, confabulations went on between Roy and some top C.S.P. leaders. Roy generally agreed with the work done by the C.S.P. and even indicated his intention to join; but he raised two objections, that is to say, whether it was possible for the C.S.P. to exist openly in the Congress, and whether an open Socialist Party in India might not be reformist. Roy had also some doubts about the Reds. The C.S.P. leaders assured him that conditions for reformism did not exist in India. At Faizpur the Royists voted unanimously

1. For relationship between the Royists and the C.S.P. from the view of latter, see J. P. Narain : *Problems of Socialist Unity in India*.
2. C.S.P.'s Reply to Roy, in the *Congress Socialist*, August 28, 1937.

in favour of the Faizpur thesis of the Party. However, early in 1937 Roy gathered his followers in Delhi and issued instructions to them not only to dissociate themselves from the C.S.P. but even to disrupt it and break it.¹ This evoked sharp comments from the socialists and communists who accused Roy of trying to disrupt left unity. They also charged him with an ambition for personal leadership, trying to build a secret party under his leadership inside the Congress.² Roy, on the contrary, charged that apart from the inexpediency of organising a Socialist Party inside the Congress, the C.S.P. had, since its Meerut Congress, abandoned its original Marxian stand.³

Elucidating further the stand he had taken in his letters to the C.S.P., Roy thoroughly repudiated the necessity of any Socialist Party inside the Congress which he regarded as the organization of the Indian people struggling for national freedom and social emancipation.⁴ His quarrel was not with the organization but its leadership, which must be changed. Roy wrote : "Our hands are tied by a reactionary philosophy. Our political actions are circumscribed by moral codes and religious creeds which disapproved of revolutionary activities. Therefore, we are moving in a vicious circle."⁵ Roy urged the radicalisation, democratisation and activation of the Congress. For this purpose he also advocated a radical change in the prevalent ideology of nationalism which was dominated by a conservative, revivalist, reactionary philosophy. A philosophical revolution was a precondition for social and national revolution. In his speeches and writings Roy, therefore, vehemently criticised Gandhism, non-violence, Hinduism, religion, absolute morality, etc.⁶ He started his paper

1. *Ibid*, statement of the National Executive of the C.S.P.
2. *Ibid*.
3. *Congress Socialist*, Dec. 23, 1936. M. N. Roy's rejoinder to Masani.
4. M. N. Roy : *On stepping out of jail*.
5. M. N. Roy : *Confession of the Monopolist in Independent India*, 13th June, 1937.
6. These are found in his writings in *Independent India*. *Fragments of a Prisoner's Diary*, *Materialism*, & *Scientific Politics*.

'Independent India' in March, 1937 which was published from Bombay. He also set up a Renaissance Institute. This being the attitude of Roy, Roy and the Roy-group remained more or less like an indifferent wayfarer inside the United Front.

The Communists and the People's Front

The communist tactics during this period underwent a big change as a result of the Moscow meeting of the Seventh World Congress of the C.I. (July 25-August 20, 1935) which laid the basis of the United Front tactics. In Chapter Five we saw how the disastrous consequences of the tactics followed by the Indian communists drew sharp rebuke and criticism from International Communism in the form of open letters, critical notes and essays in various communist organs. As a result the communists came forward with slogans of unity, the consequences of which were clearly discernible in the trade union field.¹ But in the political field the former hostile criticism of the National Congress and of the newly formed C.S.P. continued, even though, as already noted, an agreement had been signed with the latter for united work in the trade unions and for joint demonstrations and 'cease-fire' so far as criticisms from joint platforms were concerned. The September, 1934 article of Dutt specially in respect of the conflict between the leadership and the socialist orientation of its rank and file had not been favourable. According to the communists, the C.S.P. by its very formation, demonstrated that the left-national-reformism was obliged to have recourse to new and more cunning methods of action. The C.S.P. was generous in its promises of socialist nature but it also promised to bring them about through the Gandhian methods of non-violence and the slogan of 'Poorna Swaraj'. It was regarded as a dangerous rival to the C.P.I.² The I.N.C. was still a bourgeois organization, the C.S.P. a left manoeuvre of the Indian bourgeoisie, and a 'social fascist'.³

1. This Chapter, *Towards United Trade Unionism*.

2. I.P.C., 3th March, 1935 : *Problems of the anti-imperialist struggle in India*.

3. P.S.P. : *Silver Jubilee Number*, p. 24.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party had been declared illegal by the Government of India in May, 1934. The conditions of illegality prompted them to seek new left platforms and this was readily provided by the C.S.P.

It was at this stage that the Seventh World Congress of the C.I. met in Moscow. The Congress emphasized the international aspect of the united struggle against fascism and war. Both Dimitrov, in his General Report, and Wang Ming, the Chinese delegate, in his Sectional Report entitled "The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonial Countries", spoke of the need for establishing an anti-Imperialist People's Front as the main task confronting the communists. For this purpose it was necessary to draw the widest masses in the national liberation movement against growing exploitation, and for driving out the imperialists. Ming, who was very critical of the tactics followed by the Indian communists, prefaced his report by an analysis of the relative strength and weaknesses of Capitalism-Imperialism and the revolutionary movement in the colonies, and remarked that though Imperialism had intensified its offensive, yet there had been tremendous growth of the forces of colonial revolution. These developments, he said, had fully corroborated the Thesis of the Sixth Congress.¹

Coming specifically to India he criticised Indian Communists for 'left-sectarianism', and for not participating in the 'demonstrations' organised by the National Congress, thus isolating themselves from the masses in the national movement. To quote him: "Our comrades in India have suffered for a long time from 'left' sectarian errors; they did not participate in all the mass demonstrations organised by the National Congress or organizations affiliated to it. At the same time, the Indian Communists did not possess sufficient forces independently to organise a powerful and mass anti-imperialist movement."² He admitted that the Indian Communists had been trying to shake off this left-sectarian error but still they showed lack of under-

1. *Report of the Seventh World Congress.*

2. *Opt. Cit.. Revolutionary Movement in Colonies.*

standing of the tactics of the United Front as evidenced by the demands which they put forward, such as "the establishment of an Indian Workers' and Peasants' Soviet Republic", "confiscation of all lands that belong to the Zamindars", "a general strike is the only effective programme of action", etc.; putting these conditions as contingent upon the formation of a United Front. "Such demands on the part of our Indian comrades", he said, "can serve as an example of how not to carry on the tactics of the anti-imperialist United Front."¹

This United Front, he said, must be based on a programme of popular demands. For the Indian communists he listed some of them :

- (I) Fight against the Slave Constitution.
- (II) Release of all political prisoners.
- (III) Abolition of all extraordinary laws and decrees.
- (IV) Fight against lowering wages.
- (V) Fight against high land rents and against confiscation of the peasants' land for non-payment of debts.
- (VI) Establishment of democratic liberties.

The Indian Communists were asked to take an active part in the mass anti-imperialist movements headed by the 'national reformists' and strive to bring about joint action between the national-revolutionary and national-reformist organizations. They were told not to disregard work inside the National Congress but at the same time they were to maintain 'complete political and organizational independence' of their ranks.

The full implications of this policy were worked out by R. P. Dutt and Ben Bradley of the Communist Party of Great Britain in a thesis called 'The Anti-Imperialist Peoples' Front in India', published both in the Labour Monthly of March, 1936 and the International Press Correspondence, though the Indian communists had got a copy of it in January, 1936.

1. *Ibid.*

The thesis started with an analysis of the political situation in India and remarked that the Indian nationalist movement had arrived at a critical phase of its existence. The failure of the successive movements had led to a certain amount of demoralisation, and there was a confusion in the nationalist camp. The worsening economic situation had led to the sharpening of the struggles of the workers and peasants but they found themselves without a united and centralised leadership. But imperialism was trying to impose its 'slave' constitution on the common struggle. Unity of all the anti-imperialist forces, therefore, was not only the watchword of the national struggle but its indispensable condition. But this unity must not be an abstract unity, unity of the 'entire Indian population'; for there were classes and elements like the princes, the landlords, the moneylenders and reactionary religious and political elements whose interest was bound up with imperialism. But there could be unity of the overwhelming majority of the population because this unity was on the basis of the anti-imperialist struggle. The necessary basis for such a unity, the essential minimum for any individual, group or class entering this United Front must be :

- (a) a line of consistent, irreconcilable struggle against imperialism, and against the existing 'slave' constitution, for complete independence of India,
- (b) active struggle for the vital needs of the toiling masses.¹

It is to be noted that this conception of the unity of the national movement was in full accord with that of the C.S.P. of early years.

The thesis agreed that the National Congress had achieved a 'gigantic' task in uniting the wide and divergent forces of the Indian people, and was the principal existing mass organization of these diverse elements seeking national liberation. Nothing, it agreed, should be allowed

1. R. Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley *The Anti-Imperialist People's Front*, pp. 4-5.

to weaken the degree of unity that had thus been achieved. The National Congress could play "a great part and a foremost part in the work of creating the Anti-Imperialist Peoples' Front". It was even possible that the Congress, by the further transformation of its organization and programme, might become "the form of realization" of such a front.

But the Congress could not as yet be described as a United Front of the Indian people. In support of this view the authors of the thesis advanced the following reasons: "Its constitution leaves out the broadest sections of the masses. Its programme does not yet express with full clearness the programme of the national struggle. Its leadership can't yet be recognised as the leadership of the national struggle. It does not at present draw out and guide the mass activity, but rather acts as a brake upon it."¹ The leadership of the Congress, it said, was bourgeois leadership "whose interests often conflict with the interests of the masses and with the interests of the national struggle."

The thesis recalled how in the past the left had been sharply critical of the existing leadership and tactics of the National Congress, and how they had found many decisions and policies, such as the calling-off of the mass civil disobedience in 1922, the uncertain voice on the aim of independence, the waverings in relation to imperialism, the siding with the landlords against the peasants, the Delhi Pact, the cooperation in the Round Table Conference, the Poona calling-off of the struggle in 1934, disastrous to the true interests of the national struggle. These issues, of the utmost importance for the future, needed to be discussed and fought out. But this criticism against particular policies was in no sense intended as a criticism against the masses in the Congress. "Our opposition to a particular leadership or to particular policies is only intended to assist the mass army of the national struggle represented

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 6.

by the Congress and to assist and strengthen the national struggle.”¹ What was needed, without impairing the degree of unity that had been achieved through the National Congress, was to strengthen and extend this unity to a broader front and to develop to a new stage the organization and leadership of the mass struggle against imperialism.

Since the Congress was not yet a union of all elements supporting the national struggle, and, since in particular it was based upon restrictive individual membership with certain limitations of franchise, and restricted by its own special ideology and creed, it was agreed that in the course of transforming the Congress it should be necessary to make changes in its constitution. The mass organizations of peasants and workers, which were outside the Congress, must be drawn in it either by means of collective affiliation, or in a united front agreement. Within such a real Anti-Imperialist People's Front the working class could increasingly realise its role of vanguard, to lead to victory the Indian revolution. The processes envisaged might take time, but a beginning might be made by setting up joint bodies of these organizations and the Congress, not only on the national level, but also on the provincial, district and local level. It suggested democratisation of the Congress constitution in other ways also. The existing Congress machinery was not democratic as the degree of control from below was very weak. A handful of leaders held absolute power. The Working Committee, its highest executive body, which took most executive decisions and had great powers, was not elected.

The effective functioning of the Congress Organisation also suffered from the limitations of the creed of non-violence. The ideology of non-violence was at “variance with the realities of the struggle and less and less corresponds to the outlook of the large section of the national movement.” Even many Congressmen privately express-

1. *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.

ed disbelief in it. It said that to make it a "dogma compulsory on all sections is to place obstacles in the way of unity of the national front." It called for a sharp ideological struggle for throwing off this 'paralysing' conception, and for putting the entire emphasis on mass struggle. The entire emphasis should be placed on the development of the mass struggle and linking it with political struggle.

The thesis also suggested a programme of anti-imperialist struggle which included the points suggested by Ming and, in addition, a number of other items concerned with democratic freedom. The central rallying slogan, it said, could be provided by the demand for a Constituent Assembly. This demand for C. A. is something worthy of particular note since prior to that the communists had been demanding the establishment of Soviets and deprecating the demands that were being made for a C. A. But the thesis was also careful to point out that C.A. was not seen as an alternative to the Soviets but that in a given situation, as the example of the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution showed, the slogan of C.A. could be a powerful mass mobilising force in the existing stage of the national struggle. This point was elaborated more clearly in another essay, the United National Front in India, by Harry Pollitt, R. P. Dutt and Ben Bradley,¹ which also threw light on some other points. It said that as there was no opposition between independence and Socialism, so there was no opposition between the slogan of C. A. and that of Soviets. There could be no socialism without national liberation. The first task, therefore, was liberation of the country and the establishment of elementary democracy. The slogan of C.A. was an expression of this urge. But precisely because this struggle could not succeed without drawing in the mass of the workers and peasantry, it also envisaged as a development which opened the way for the further activity of

1. *International Press Correspondence*. 7th November, 1936.

the masses, and for the advance to the higher form of democracy, or Soviet democracy and to Socialism.¹

To return to the thesis, as a prelude to this United Front of all anti-imperialists it emphasized the establishment, as soon as possible, of the unity of all left-wing elements within the Congress. In the past there had been much dispersion of effort, division and sniping between the left-wing forces. Whatever ideological differences there might be, these should be thoroughly discussed and cleared up in comradely discussion, but even if some differences remained, there was no reason why they should stand in the way of the fullest cooperation and common working on all issues on which agreement could be reached. In particular it was possible to agree on a common, minimum programme of national struggle. In this realization of left unity the C.S.P., as the grouping of all left elements in the existing Congress, could play an essentially important part, but because of this it was necessary to clarify questions of programme and tactics in the C.S.P. The communists had to play important role in this. The thesis also emphasized the urgent need of trade union unity in India.

The Dutt-Bradley thesis came on the eve of the Lucknow session of the National Congress held in April, 1936. It was from this session that the United Front of the leftists started working in a concerted manner. Indeed the C.P.I. was gradually recovering from the morass it had found itself in due to its own left-sectarianism and the action of the Government in declaring all communist and allied organizations, with their organs, illegal. In the beginning of 1936 an underground centre was formed, and work also started in the provinces. A meeting of the Central Committee of the Party was held at the time of the Lucknow Congress and it elected a new Polit Bureau. P. C. Joshi was elected General Secretary. An underground paper appeared. It was from this time onwards that the first systematic and successful attempt to function as an

1. *Ibid.*

all-India centre began. This centre became active from Lucknow onwards, though it took a few months more to be effective over Party units all over India. The Polit Bureau of the Communist Party of India in a statement issued in March, 1936 and entitled 'For the United National Front', welcomed the thesis and issued directions to its members to act in accordance with the spirit of the thesis, emphasizing that there was no contradiction between fight for socialism and democratic freedom. But even after this, it took some time for all communists to agree to this line. Indeed it was not till the middle of 1937 that full party unity on the question of the United National Front could be achieved. Meanwhile, the second annual conference of the C.S.P. held at Meerut in January, 1936 had already opened its door to membership for individual communists, whereby making it possible for the communists to work openly. The appearance of the United Front embracing the communists and the socialists can be dated from this time.

An expression of this gradual broadening of the national front was the emergence of the organizations of students, who, from this time onwards, became actively associated with the national movement, the 1942 Quit India movement being an epitome of their acts of sacrifice, sufferings, courage and patriotism. The All-India Students' Federation was formed in August, 1935. In the years that followed the Federation became a force in the national life of the country. In 1936 was also formed the All-India Progressive Writers' Association. The All-India States' Peoples' Conference, which was to play a notable role in the advancement of the democratic rights of the peoples of the native states, also came into being at this time. The confluence of these forces made the period a really memorable one.

The United Front at Work

The real concerted action of all these left elements, groups and organizations for the realization of the aims

on which they were agreed became clearly discernible from the time of the Lucknow Session of the National Congress in April, 1936. The Congress itself was being presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru, who was not only in agreement with these aims but also, in principle, with the idea of a United Front. As discussed earlier in Chapter Five, Nehru had been talking and writing profusely about socialism and his writings of the period bore distinct impact of the socialistic ideas of the West.¹ Though his pattern of socialism did not conform to any particular school of socialism but, as in the case of most other Indian leftists of this period, it carried the impress of Marxian-Socialism. He spoke and wrote admiring Marx and Lenin and paid handsome tributes to the achievements of Soviet Russia. For him the Socialist approach was the approach of Marxism² but his Marxism was not of the orthodox school; neither did he look upon Marxism as a system, but rather as a method, as 'a way of looking at past and present history'. As such he also welcomed the Marxian interpretation of history, as it gave a scientific outlook of life and history and as Nehru claimed himself, above all, as a man of science, he accepted that approach. His whole approach towards Marxism was expressed in a nutshell: "The Marxian philosophy appeals to me in a broad sense and helps me to understand the process of history. I am far from being an orthodox Marxist, nor does any other orthodoxy appeal to me."³ Socialism for him became a thought-system to evaluate the political problems facing the country and the world at large.

Nehru's Presidential address to the Lucknow Congress, 1936, and his address to the Faizpur Congress in December of the same year, were excellent dissertations on socialism, internationalism, anti-Fascism and pro-Sovietism. He made a strong plea in favour of establishing socialism in

1. *Nehru's writings of this period are: Autobiography; India and the West; Recent Essays and Writings; Eighteen months in India; Unity of India, and a host of other essays and speeches.*
2. *Eighteen Months in India, p. 38.*
3. *Unity of India, p. 117.*

India. First he declared outright: "Socialism is for me not merely an economic doctrine which I favour, it is a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart."¹ After this declaration of faith he said: "I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems lies in socialism, and when I use this word, I do so not in a vague humanitarian sense but in the scientific economic sense."² But, as in the earlier years, he also made it clear that Marxism and socialism were not the immediate issues before the Congress. National independence remained the burning question. On other issues facing the country he declared himself in favour of the stands taken by the left-wing. He described the New Constitution as a 'Charter of Slavery' and declared that it should be 'wrecked' by actions both inside and outside the legislature. The strength of the nationalist movement, he said, lay in the mass organizations of workers and peasants, and in the mass action that it could undertake. Therefore, it was desirable that these organizations be affiliated to the Congress. He also hoped that the logic of events would lead the Congress to socialism. "This identification of the Congress with the economic struggle of the masses will bring us nearer to them and nearer to freedom than anything else."³ Encouraged and strengthened by this lead, the left-wing started talking of 'our Socialist President' and rallied round him on the various issues that he raised. Thus Nehru became an unofficial leader of the left-wing, though some left-elements criticised him for fighting Gandhism in theory but surrendering in practice. According to them he had not as yet developed an alternative outlook, an alternative ideology. His conflicts with the old leaders were 'episodic in their character, transitory in their effect.'⁴ The Lucknow Congress brought the opposing

1. *Presidential address to Lucknow Congress, 1936, in India and the West, p. 23.*
2. *Ibid, p. 82.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *B. T. Ranadive: Crisis in National Leadership, in Congress Socialist, 25th April, 1936.*

wings in the National Congress in clearer definition, and hardened the alignment of forces. The Left was pleased with Nehru's address but the Right felt uneasy. Rumours of a split into Right and Left were mooted in the Press.

Beginning with 1929 when Nehru had been proposed to be the President, the tactics of the Right was to accommodate the Left, provided it worked within limits. So long as the issues remained on a theoretical level, the Right did not care much, but when from 1936 onwards these issues posed themselves in a practical manner the Right resisted. At Lucknow even some of President's recommendations were rejected. Nehru could not constitute a Working Committee of his own likings. He could include, besides Bose, only three Congress Socialists, that is, Jai-prakash Narain, Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhan. While this meagre representation of the Left evoked dismay from Rafi Ahmad Kidwai,¹ the rightists were not happy at the general socialist tenor of Nehru's speeches and utterances. In June, 1936 six of them resigned their seats from the Working Committee, their contention being that there was no loyalty of the spirit which bound them together. They deplored preaching and emphasizing of socialism by Nehru and other socialist members of the Working Committee, while the Congress had not adopted it as its goal. Nehru was filled with consternation and himself resigned. But Gandhi's intervention, desire for unity, Spanish Civil War, etc. brought about a rapprochement. The acceptance of seats on the Working Committee by some Congress Socialists brought some heart-burning among the group. Sampurnanand writes : 'I am not sure that the homogeneity and solidarity which had characterised us from the beginning did not receive a serious blow by what some of us felt to be a weak temporising with right-wing leadership.'²

1. *A Bunch of old letters*, p. 174.

2. *Sampurnanand : Memories and reflections*, p. 81.

One of the issues that came before this Congress was the policy to be adopted regarding the New Constitution. Both the Right and the Left inside the Congress were opposed to the Constitution but differences arose when it came to deciding how it should be opposed in practice, and as to whether participation in the legislatures and acceptance of office were suitable methods of opposition to it. The left wing was not opposed to parliamentarism as such provided it was backed by extra-parliamentary force and involved no acceptance of office. The attitude of the left was well expressed in the Faizpur thesis of the C.S.P., which agreed that "revolutionary parliamentarism is an integral part of the national freedom." But the left was dead against accepting office. It argued that, since the Congress was uncompromisingly opposed to the Government of India Act, 1935, its representatives could not possibly accept ministerial offices and thus help to work the Constitution. Any acceptance of office was a compromise with imperialism. Nehru set the tone of the left-wing in this respect when he said: "If the Congress decides to accept office under the new Act, I am quite sure to that extent it will cooperate with and strengthen British Imperialism."¹ The left had also a fear that it would open the road to constitutionalism and provide an alternative to mass struggle. It, therefore, wished that simultaneously with the decision to accept entry into legislatures as a part of the Congress activity, the Congress should categorically declare, and embody it in the Election Manifesto, that Congressmen elected to the legislatures would in no circumstance accept ministerial offices or otherwise take or share responsibility in carrying on the foreign administration. The alternative to the Constitution, according to it, was the slogan for a Constituent Assembly.²

The right-wing, on the other hand, argued that office-acceptance in the provinces need not necessarily be contradictory to the general policy of wrecking the Constitu-

1. *Nehru: Eighteen Months in India*, p. 20.

2. *Faizpur Thesis of C.S.P., 1936*,

tion. According to it the major and crucial part of the Constitution was that which related to the centre and that, therefore, the Congress could very well utilise power in the provinces to strengthen the struggle against the whole constitution. Thus a furious controversy raised over the issue. In the end a compromise resolution, moved by Gandhi, was accepted, though not without loud protest from the left. It authorised the policy of fighting the ensuing elections, but postponed decision on office-acceptance until the next Congress.

Another issue that the left-wing raised at the Congress was the desirability of the Congress establishing close contacts with the masses and mass organizations. The left was putting emphasis upon mass struggle not only to fight the Constitution, but also to carry the national struggle to a successful conclusion. For the first time in history, side by side with the Congress Session, the first annual conference of the All-India Kisan Congress was taking place.¹ The left was insisting upon the collective affiliation of the organization of peasants and workers to the Congress. Nehru himself proposed such an affiliation but the resolution was defeated in the subjects committee and a Mass Contacts Committee was formed instead, for further consideration of the problem. The Congress also appointed two sub-committees, the Labour Sub-Committee and the Agrarian Sub-Committee, to study and make reports on labour and agrarian problems respectively, and to find out the best means of promoting contacts of the Congress with the organizations of the workers and peasants. The Congress recognised the importance of mass contact and recommended to the Provincial Congress Committees, that they promote such contacts. The Provincial Committees were also asked to make recommendations to the Working Committee on agrarian problems so as to enable the A.I.C.C. to draw up an all-India agrarian programme. These measures were not what the left-wing wanted but

1. For detail, see this Chapter. Formation of A.I.K.C.

they were obviously a reflection of the pressure that it exercised. This was also reflected in another resolution of the Congress which reiterated the Fundamental Rights Resolution of the Karachi Congress (1931) and in that connection observed that "the appalling poverty, unemployment and indebtedness of the peasantry was fundamentally due to antiquated and repressive land tenure and revenue system." Despite influence of the Left, the outcome of this Congress was that the majority gave full support to the old leadership.

Beginning with the Lucknow Congress the Left also started bringing the problem of imperialist war-danger before the Congress. It brought anti-war resolutions, and urged the Congress to prepare for the coming crisis.

The Congress having decided to contest the forthcoming elections to the new legislatures, the next duty of the left-wing was to see that it adopted a really radical Election Manifesto; for according to it, election was one of the means of increasing contacts with the masses and to carry the message of the Congress to them. Again, a battle royal raged over the preparation of the Manifesto and though the Manifesto, which was issued in August, 1936, was not wholly satisfactory to the left-wing, it nevertheless welcomed it as a sufficiently positive document with robust and militant tone and it pledged to fight the elections in full support of it, and to maintain the unity of the Congress. The Congress Socialists generally supported the Manifesto but while supporting it at the A.I.C.C. meeting in Bombay, Narendra Deva made it clear that the socialists criticised the absence of a concrete programme of the economic demands of the masses. They also wanted a definite commitment in the manifesto itself for not accepting office.¹ The communists prepared two draft election manifestoes, one to be placed before the Congress, and the other for the Party. In the former it demanded democratic rights for states' people, unrestricted right to strike, 8-hour day,

1. A.I.C.S.P.: *General Secretary's Report (1936)*, p. 5.

complete independence and wrecking the Constitution etc. In the latter it called for W. & P. Soviet Republic, abolition of native states, confiscation of British capital etc.¹

The Manifesto was the first programme prepared by the Congress on the basis of which it sought the confidence of the people. At the outset it declared that the Congress laid the greatest stress on the development of the strength of the people and the actions that they carried through outside the legislature. The Congress was entering the legislature only to wreck the Act. It said that independence could not be achieved through these legislatures, nor could the problems of poverty and unemployment be effectively tackled by them and that the general programme that it was putting before the people was to show what the Congress "stands for and what it will try to achieve, whenever it has power to do so."² To the peasantry it offered a reform of the system of land-tenure and revenue and rent, and an equitable adjustment of the burden on agricultural land. It advocated immediate relief to the smaller peasantry by a substantial reduction of agricultural rent and revenue and exempting uneconomic holdings from payment of rent and revenue. It declared that the question of indebtedness required urgent consideration and pledged the formulation of a scheme including the declaration of a moratorium, an enquiry into and scaling down of debts and provision for cheap credit facilities by the State.

In regard to the industrial workers, the Manifesto declared that the policy of the Congress was to secure a decent standard of living, hours of work and conditions of labour, in conformity, as far as the economic conditions in the country permitted, with international standards. It promised suitable machinery for the settlement of disputes, protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment. It recognised the right, both of the workers and the peasants, to form unions. It also

1. *The Communist*, September, 1936.

2. *The Congress Election Manifesto*, 1936.

recognised the right of workers to strike for the protection of their interests.¹ It declared its opposition to the Constitution and favoured a Constituent Assembly.

It was in the midst of preparations for elections that the Faizpur session of the Congress met in December, 1936. This Congress was memorable in more than one way. It was the first session of the Congress that was being held in a village and as such it was a demonstration not only of the faith that the Congress was putting in the peasant masses on the eve of the elections, but it was also demonstrative of the faith of the masses in the Congress. For here was also being held the second annual conference of the All-India Peasants Congress, as also the third conference of the All-India Congress Socialist Party. The Congress itself was again being presided over by Nehru. His election had been facilitated due to withdrawal of Patel from the contest who, however, had made it clear that he differed from Nehru fundamentally. During his first year of presidentship, the left-wing had considerably strengthened its position so that by the Faizpur Congress it not only had four of its members on the Working Committee² but it also constituted roughly one-third of the A.I.C.C. As at Lucknow, heretoo, Nehru preached full-throated socialism. In respect of other issues he repeated his earlier stand.

At Faizpur the National Congress adopted an Agrarian Programme consisting of 13 points. It demanded the reduction of rents and land-revenue, annulment or scaling down of debts, abolition of forced labour and feudal dues, a living wage for agricultural workers and the right for peasants' union etc. The Programme was adopted after a good deal of controversy, and, according to Ranga, the peasant leader, after a "bitter fight" The left-wing in general, and the Kisan elements in particular, were not satisfied with it. According to the Kisan leaders it fell

1. *Ibid.*

2. They were : Subhas Chandra Bose, Narendra Dev, J. P. Narain and Achyut Patwardhan.

far short of the Kisans' economic demands. They accepted it only provisionally and Ranga was forced to say : "Our Kisans and workers have to forge their own sanctions to force the acceptance of their demands upon vested interests."¹

The question of collective affiliation of the organizations of Kisans and Workers could not get through even at Faizpur. The two sub-committees that had been appointed at the Lucknow Session did not make much headway in this respect. After the establishment of the Labour Sub-Committee of the Congress, the Joint Labour Board of the two central organizations of the All-India Trade Unions (that had already come into existence),² tried to arrange a meeting with it. A joint meeting was even held at Madras but nothing tangible came out of it. The Labour Sub-Committee only advised the employers to realize the necessity of giving facilities to the workers for building of their organizations and giving recognition to 'bonafide' unions. It also advised the Congress Committees "to take more active interest in questions affecting the welfare of the industrial labour and give all such help as they can to the unions working on principles and policies not in conflict with the principles and policies of the Congress." At Faizpur even Nehru was not quite enthusiastic about affiliation-question and, according to Ranga, Nehru 'cooled down on the subject partly due to the opposition of the Right and partly due to the opposition of M. N. Roy."³ As already mentioned M. N. Roy had just been released in November, 1936 and the very beginning paragraph of Nehru's Presidential address contained a welcome to M. N. Roy, "one of the bravest and ablest of India's sons of present generations." Soon afterwards Roy joined the Congress. By the time of his release Roy had moved further to the Right of the position he took in his letters to the C.S.P. He was now propounding the doctrine that there

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, p. 282.
2. *This Chapter, Towards United Trade Unionism*.
3. *Annual Register*, 1936, p. 288.

was no need in the Congress for the class organizations of peasants and workers, and that they should enter the Congress as just individual members.¹ He still held that only the active participation of workers could transform the Congress into an effective organ of national struggle. He maintained that the working class could not wait to join the Congress and participate in the national struggle till its demand for collective affiliation was granted. Only a small fraction of the Indian workers and peasants were organised. Collective affiliation would touch only this fraction. Moreover, the demand would not be granted unless the workers were there to exert pressure.² But as the other left-elements like the Congress Socialists, Communists and the Kisan leaders, were still insisting upon it, the Congress appointed a sub-committee to consider the introduction of a suitable change in the Constitution. It stressed the desirability of 'increasing the association of the masses with the Congress organization', and requested the P.C.Cs. to organise their provincial organizations in such a manner as to give effect to this policy.

The postponed question of office-acceptance again came before this Congress. The left-wing, as before, was against it. Nehru, in his Presidential address, gave expression to the feeling of the Left when he pointed out that they were not going to the legislatures to pursue the path of constitutionalism or a barren reformism, but to combat the Act and seek to end it. It moved two amendments to the main resolution that was being passed. One related to definitive refusal to accept office and the other to preparation for mass struggle in order to make possible the realization of the Constituent Assembly. But the Left itself was not solidly united on the issue. Both in respect of fighting elections and office-acceptance, Roy had his own views. He wanted the election campaign to be conducted primarily with the purpose of mobilising mass energy for a more effective form of struggle. Office-acceptance for him

1. We shall turn to it again in detail later on.

2. M. N. Roy : *On Stepping out of Jail*, p. 11.

was a minor issue.¹ Constitution could not be wrecked either by entering the Councils or by boycotting them but only by extra-parliamentary mass action and the electoral propaganda should be utilised for that. The socialists and communists staged many walk-outs from the A.I.C.C. Their motion was defeated, but the resolution that the Congress adopted was a concession to the left, insofar as it was an absolute and unequivocal rejection of the Constitution. It read : "This Congress reiterates its entire rejection of the Government of India Act of 1935 and the Constitution that has been imposed on India against the declared will of the people of the country. In the opinion of the Congress any cooperation with this Constitution is a betrayal of India's struggle for freedom, and a strengthening of the hold of British Imperialism and a further exploitation of the Indian masses who have already been reduced to direst poverty under imperialist domination. The Congress, therefore, repeats its resolve not to submit to this Constitution or to cooperate with it, but to combat it, both inside and outside the legislatures, so as to end it. The Congress does not and will not recognise the right of any external power or authority to dictate the political and economic structure of India and every such attempt will be met by organised and uncompromising opposition of the Indian people."² The Congress again postponed the question of office-acceptance to be decided by the A.I.C.C. after elections.

The Congress fought the election as a united body. There were, no doubt, some difficulties in regard to the selections of candidates. The left-wing complained that the Parliamentary Board had in several provinces refused the candidature of left-elements and accepted others noted for their reactionary, anti-national activities. They also criticised making of pacts and compromises with communal groups. There were some piquant situations in a few labour seats in Bombay, etc., where even the candi-

1. Roy : *On stepping out of Jail*, p. 5.

2. Raghuvanshy : *Indian Nationalist Movement & Thought*, p. 276.

dates recommended by the A.I.T.U.C. were not accepted, thus resulting in contests between official Congress candidates and the Trade Union Congress candidates, particularly those sponsored by the communists but the C.S.P. directed its members not to contest official Congress candidates. But the C.S.P. passed a resolution that in all such cases the Parliamentary Board had 'violated the spirit of the Congress Election Manifesto.'¹ These notwithstanding, the left whole-heartedly supported the election campaign. A number of leftists contested on Congress tickets in U.P., Punjab and elsewhere. They utilised this opportunity for increasing contacts with the masses. The communists even issued a slogan: "Transform the elections into mighty Anti-Imperialist Demonstrations."²

The broad democratic programme embodied in the Manifesto, with its direct voicing of the immediate demands of peasants and industrial workers played a big part in mobilising the overwhelming mass support that won the elections. A number of left candidates were successful in the elections. For example, in the Punjab most of the Sikhs elected on Congress tickets were pronounced leftists; and in Bengal all trade union seats were won by the United Front of the leftists. After the elections the postponed question of office-acceptance came before a meeting of the A.I.C.C. in March, 1937. In spite of the opposition from the left, it authorised office-acceptance if government gave certain assurances. Two factors detracted from the force of the leftist opposition. The one was the Rightist argument that it was opposed to the Constitution and that it entered the government to mobilise support for the Congress and to wreck it from within. Secondly, if they did not enter the government, others would do so and would seek to stifle the Congress. Socialists staged many walk-outs from the A.I.C.C. The three socialist members of the Working Committee, Dev, Narain

1. *Resolutions of Faizpur C.S.P. Conference.*

2. *For this item see, National Front of Oct.-Nov., 1936.*

and Patwardhan, resigned their seats as a protest and the Left organised a Protest Day on 1st April, 1937, the day on which the Constitution was to be inaugurated. The Left forces organised massive hartals and demonstrations in many parts of the country on this day. But some persons like Sampurnanand left the C.S.P. for this negative attitude of the Left.

After months of negotiations Congress ministries were formed in July, 1937 in U.P., Bihar, Orissa, Bombay, C.P., Madras and the N.W.F.P. Later Congress coalition governments were formed in Assam and Sind. The assumption of office by the Congress set a wave of joy and enthusiasm throughout the country. During the elections people in the remotest corners of the country had been awakened to a sudden realization that something big was coming. The Congress Ministries, in their earlier period, had some praiseworthy achievements to their credit to justify this unbounded enthusiasm of the people. They released most political prisoners. They legalised a number of organizations, only the ban on C.P.I. imposed by the Central Government remained. They cancelled internment and deportation orders imposed on political prisoners, returned securities to a number of newspapers. They brought in some agrarian legislation and in spite of financial limitations, some measures of social, educational and health reforms were attempted. On the question of debt, measures were adopted for the cancelling of old arrears as in the Madras Agriculturists Debt Relief Act, for immediate moratorium, as in U.P. and Bombay, and for scaling down of debts and limitations of rates of interest. Tenancy legislation was carried, which aimed to afford a certain degree of protection against the summary ejection of tenants, to cancel enhancement of rents, to remove irregular additional dues and charges, and to limit interest on arrears of rent. In some cases remissions of land-revenue were granted.

But these measures fell far short of what the people expected or what even the Election Manifesto had promised. Hardly a year had passed when the workings of

several ministries came in for severe criticism by Left nationalists, socialists and Labour and Peasant leaders. They criticised them for restricting civil liberties and adopting repressive measures. The Criminal Law Amendment Act had always been branded by the Congress as an oppressive measure and its use by Congressmen was resented. The Congress Government promulgated Section 144 in Ahmedabad when the workers there went on strike. Left-wing trade unionists had by then penetrated into labour unions that had so far been under the influence of the Mazdoor Mahajan. In Sholapur a number of Labour leaders were arrested on the "Release of Political Prisoners Day." The workings of the Madras Ministry under Rajajee also came in for severe criticism when S. C. Batliwala, a young Socialist Congressman was sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment under Section 124A of Indian Penal Code. It was under this section of the code that some Congressmen themselves had been formerly tried. Bitter feeling was aroused over the action and Nehru criticised it in sharp terms.¹ Bose expressed his dissatisfaction in his Haripura address. In Bombay, the Bombay Trades Dispute Act was enacted. It restricted freedom of strike and laid down rules for registration which in practice worked in favour of unions sponsored by the employers. It also provided for a period of compulsory conciliation during which strike-action was illegal. Both the moderates and the radical sections in the trade unions condemned it. The two sections of the all-India trade unions finally agreed to reunite during this period and the United Trade Union Congress gave a call for a protest strike on November 8, 1938. There were serious demonstrations which the Government put down by force. Election Manifesto had guaranteed the right of workers to strike and its curtailment by Congress Governments was criticised as a breach of Congress promises.

These developments led to a sharp controversy inside the Congress. Orthodox Gandhites shook their heads over

1. *Nehru : Unity of India*, p. 104.

the use of force by Congress Governments and controversy over 'non-violence' arose.¹ Jawaharlal Nehru was pained at these developments and wrote : "I feel strongly that the Congress Ministers are working ineffectively and not doing much that they could do. They are trying to adapt themselves far too much to the old order and trying to justify it."²

The effect of their disillusionment became clearly discernible inside both the peasant and the labour movements. The peasantry was not satisfied with the inadequate measures that had been taken. They could not touch the main springs of poverty and exploitation, and were indeed enacted with great consideration for landlords and money-lenders. The Kisan leaders criticised in particular the Congress-Zamindar Pact in Bihar.³ In Bihar the Kisan movement came in conflict with the Congress. In other provinces also the measures taken touched neither the lower strata of Kisans nor agricultural workers. The dissatisfaction of the Kisans with Congress Governments found expression in a number of protest meetings, conferences and demonstrations organised by the Kisan Sabha to bring pressure on governments to implement their demands; as also in the phenomenal growth of the peasant movement. But the Right Wing leaders of the Congress and Congress Ministries disapproved of such extra-parliamentary forms of struggle. Kisan leaders, on the other hand, criticised them for banning meetings and using police-force against Kisans. It began openly to be said by them that "only a Satyagraha campaign of peasants or a strike of industrial workers which can open the eyes of the public and especially workers and peasants to the inability of our Provincial Ministers as they are constituted today to satisfy even their minimum demands and the unwillingness of our legislatures to transcend their class pre-

1. For this point see Pattabhi Sitaramayya : *Gandhi and Gandhism*, Chapter 4.
2. Nehru : *Unity of India*, p. 106.
3. The Kisan leader Saraswati came in with a sharp criticism in *The Other Side of the Shield*.

judices and interests.”¹ Even a change of very personnel of Congress leadership and the contents of its programme and principles came to be suggested. From the later half of 1937 strikes were being frequently resorted to. Big peasants’ struggles took place all through 1938.² The measures of Congress Ministries in relation to these, particularly in Madras and Bombay, were criticised by the Left.

The suspicion between the Congress and Kisan elements grew. The All-India Kisan Congress, at its Com-milla Conference in 1938, changed its name to All-India Kisan Sabha and adopted the Red Flag. For the first time the National Congress did not cooperate with this Kisan Conference.³ The Kisan leaders on their part took pains to point out that they were not hostile to the Congress and that they wanted to strengthen the hands of the Congress and the Congress Ministry. To the plea of the Congress Ministries that nothing more could be done under the existing powers, the Kisan leaders and other left-elements invariably argued that it was for wrecking the Constitution that the Congress had entered office and that it should create crisis and resign.

A similar wave of unrest was to be seen among the industrial workers, which resulted in the big strikes of 1937-38, and in the great upsurge in trade union activity. The number of registered trade unions alone rose to 296 in 1938. The number of strikes in 1937 reached 379, the highest since 1921 and involving some 6,48,000 workers. The peak of these strikes were the Bengal Jute Workers’ Strike, and the Cawnpur Textile Workers’ Strike. A notable feature of these strikes was that they had the sympathy and active support of some Provincial Congress Committees.⁴

The Right-Wing Congress leaders, on the other hand, maintained that the leftists were out to weaken the Con-

1. *Ranga : Kisans & Congress*, p. 22.

2. Details of these are available in *Ranga : Modern Indian Peasant, Ranga : Kisan and Congress and The Kisan Bulletin, 1938*.

3. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 55.

4. *Annual Register, 1937, 1938*.

gress to serve their own ends. Their view was also shared by Nehru who held that some of the leftist elements in the Congress had not behaved with responsibility and had deliberately encouraged tendencies which could only lead to internal conflict and the weakening of the Congress. Their idea of a joint front had the protection of the Congress and, therefore, to attack it and criticise it from outside was not correct. Often the Red Flag became a challenge to the National Flag. The Kisan Sabha frequently functioned as a permanent opposition to the local Congress Committee, leading not only to frictions, conflicts and irritations but also to indiscipline in the Congress.

It was in this atmosphere of mutual mistrust and suspicion that the Haripura Session of the National Congress met in 1938. The Congress was being presided over by a leftist, Subhas Chandra Bose. The Right made it clear that it wanted the Left to put a restraint upon its aggressiveness in the agrarian and industrial field. It brought a resolution on Kisans and Kisan organizations which, while declaring that the Congress fully recognised the right of Kisans to organise in their Sabhas, also made it clear that the Congress could not associate itself with any activities which were incompatible with the basic principles of the Congress. It maintained that it would not countenance any activities of those Congressmen, who as members of the Kisan Sabhas, helped in creating an atmosphere hostile to the Congress. It asked Provincial Committees to take suitable action. Gandhi maintained that separate Kisan organizations were not working for the interests of Kisans but with a view to capture the Congress. It again emphasized that the Congress was a Kisan organization and stood for their welfare. The tactics of the left were to force the political issues into the open for discussion and compel the Congress to make decisions on them. It again brought up the questions of affiliation of the organizations of Kisans and workers and other related matters which, however, again could not get through. But the main issue on which the Left concentrated was the problem of Federation and

the position of the Congress in relation to it. Should the Congress wait till the inauguration of the Federation and then prepare to oppose it or should it organise struggle to force the Government to concede to people's will? This, in short, was the issue at stake. The situation was complicated by the fact that already war-clouds had started gathering in the international sky. The left-wing urged taking advantage of the situation.

The policy of the Right seemed to be to wait until the Federation was inaugurated and then to decide its course of action. Led by Rajaji and Patel the Rightists maintained that they were prepared for a compromise, if it was to be an honourable one. They did not appreciate the idea of taking any stand which might prejudice Britain's stand against Fascism. They held that in the international field she upheld the cause of democracy. On this ground they were not prepared either to launch a struggle or to make arrangements for it.

The Leftists criticised them for their reformist and compromising outlook. Bose in his Presidential address to the Haripura Congress prophesied that war was inevitable, that Britain would be involved in difficulties, and that out of it, India should secure advantages.¹ He had the full backing of the Left on the point. The Left generally was in favour of preparing for a mass struggle. Its feeling was that the Congress was settling down to working the Constitution and turning itself towards Constitutionalism. Bose later made it a point of contention in the next Presidential election. According to the Left elements although Congress had rejected the Federal scheme, it had no programme of action in case it was sought to be imposed.

The Left-Wing programme for combating Federation was contained in a six-point programme of the Lahore Conference of the C.S.P. (1938). It stated that the best way to fight Federation was :

- (1) To organise resistance to the Federation by exposing the limitations imposed on the Provincial

1. *Presidential Address of Bose to Haripura Session, 1938.*

Ministries in their task of extending economic relief to the masses and thus to develop their day-to-day struggle for political and economic conditions.

- (2) To utilise the control of the Provincial administration to neutralise the bureaucratic resistance and to sustain and strengthen the struggle outside.
- (3) To develop the Congress and other popular movements in a non-Congress Province with a view to shake the hold of the reactionary ministers and to make their existence impossible.
- (4) To organise and support every struggle of the Indian States' people for democratic rights and against the inhuman economic and social conditions in which they had to live, thus making State people's movement an organic part of the national movement.
- (5) To emphasize in all propaganda the positive demand for C.A.
- (6) In the event of any attempt to impose the Federation, to prepare the country for a nation-wide mass struggle, including a no-tax and no-rent campaign and a general strike on a national scale.¹

While it had not as yet come to a definite conclusion, the Right was already thinking in terms of parliamentarism, of peaceful transfer of power, and of Swaraj without struggle. Its uneasiness with the Left was, in part, born out of it.

A new problem for the Congress, and one upon which the Right and the Left were again found to be divided, was the struggle for greater democracy and freedom by the peoples of the Indian Native States. The Indian Princely States had always been famous for their autocratic rule and for suppression of even those limited democratic rights

1. Resolution of the Lahore Conference of C.S.P. (1938)

and civil liberties that were available in British India. The Indian National Congress had so far confined its activities exclusively to the British India and had adopted a policy of non-interference in the Indian States. After the passage of the Government of India Act, 1935, with its undemocratic procedure in regard to the Native States so far as their participation in the proposed Federal scheme was concerned, the Left had begun to take an interest in the States where democratic movements had been started under Congressmen. Some of the left-elements were, in their individual capacities, organising struggles of the peoples of various States for civil liberties and democratic rights. The formation of popular Ministries in the Provinces of British India in 1937 gave a fillip to these struggles. The States affected were Mysore, Kashmir, Travancore, Rajkot, etc. Shortly before the opening of the Haripura Congress, a struggle had ensued in Mysore State to which the All-India Congress Committee meeting at Calcutta had extended its sympathy and fraternal greetings, supported the right of self-determination and condemned the police repressions in the State of Mysore. Later on, however, doubts were raised regarding this resolution in view of the Congress policy of non-interference in the affairs of the Native States, Gandhi himself having been opposed to the Calcutta resolution. It was, therefore, that a resolution was moved by Maulana Azad on behalf of the Working Committee reiterating its policy of non-interference and requiring that no struggles in the States should be conducted in the name of the National Congress. A serious controversy developed over this issue. The Left-wing not only urged a policy of close cooperation between struggles in States and in British India but it also advocated the launching of mass struggle in the States to win civil liberties and responsible government. The delegates from the States were very much shocked. One of them, Jaya Narain Vyas, who was later to become the Chief Minister of one of these states, asked : "Would you take away from us what even autocratic rulers or bureaucratic imperialism

has not dared to take away, namely, our right to be in the Congress."¹ Even the Right was divided on this issue and Dr. P. Sittaramaya, who had taken some interest in the movements in the States moved an amendment, which was subsequently passed, and which required that the Congress Committees in the States should function under direction and control of the Working Committee of the National Congress and they should not engage in direct action in the name of or under the auspices of National Congress. But the Congress also reiterated that it stood for the same political, social and economic freedom in the States as in the rest of India. It extended its goodwill and support to such struggles carried on in a legitimate and peaceful manner. But under the existing circumstances Congress was not in a position to work effectively to this end. Individual Congressmen were free to render assistance. An acrimonious controversy took place.

It was amidst these controversies between the Right and the Left that Bose decided to stand for the second time for Presidentship of the Tripuri Congress (1939). He was being backed by all Left-elements. For the first time this post was being contested and it was indicative of the growing cleavage between the Right and the Left. The Left also deplored the aggressive mood of the Right in so far as the A.I.C.C. resolution on Civil Liberty was concerned. This resolution passed with particular eye on the harassment-tactics of the Left so far as the Congress Ministries were concerned, deplored the acts of murder, arson, looting and class-war by violent means by people in general, including a few Congressmen. It extended support to Congress governments in the measures they might undertake against such activities, in defence of life and property. Some leftists even staged a walk-out against the resolution. The Rightists set up Dr. Pattabhi Sittaramayya as their candidate. Attempts were made to avoid a contest; prominent Right-Wing members of the Working Committee

1. *Indian Annual Register, 1938, Report of Annual Session of National Congress.*

issued a joint statement urging Bose to withdraw. According to them the President merely symbolised the unity and solidarity of the nation, and matters of policy were left to be decided by the Working Committee. The reply of Bose, which, in fact, was the reply of the whole Left, was : " this attempt to set up a rightist candidate for the office of President is not without significance. It is widely believed that there is a prospect of a compromise on the Federal scheme between the right-wing of the Congress and the British Government during the coming year. And consequently the right-wing does not want a leftist President who may be a thorn in the way of a compromise. It is imperative in the circumstances to have a Congress President who will be an anti-federationist to the core of his heart." While not agreeing with the Right that the President was merely a figure-head, he said he was ready to withdraw if a leftist like Narendra Dev could be accepted. But this was not to be.

In the election, which was a very keenly contested one, Bose won by 1,580 to 1,375. But the Right was not prepared to accept the defeat lying down. Taking a clue from a statement of Gandhi that Pattabhi's defeat was more truly his defeat, it evoked the name of Gandhi and tried to rally the rank and file around it. On the eve of the Tripuri Congress, rightist members of the Working Committee resigned, saying that they felt the time had come when the country should have a clear-cut policy not based on a compromise between different incompatible groups of the Congress, and urging Bose to select a homogeneous Working Committee. Nehru also resigned but he issued a separate statement in which he said that he tried to bring a compromise between the Right and the Left, but had not succeeded.

It was under the shadow of this internal crisis that the Congress met at Tripuri in March, 1939. Bose was seriously ill and could not be personally present at the session. His address was read out to the delegates in which he insisted

that the time had come to formulate National Demands, on the basis of which an ultimatum could be presented to the Government with a fixed time-limit for their implementation. Should the demands be not conceded, the Congress should call for a nation-wide struggle.¹

At the Congress the Right sponsored a resolution, now famous Pant resolution, which reaffirmed faith in the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and enjoined upon Bose to select his Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhi. Aney brought another resolution to refer the matter to the A.I.C.C., due to the illness of Bose. There were uproarious scenes and even Nehru was not allowed to speak. Aney later withdrew his resolution.

This resolution itself was a result of behind the scenes activities by both Nehru and Azad as a result of which the Right slightly modified its pre-Tripuri rigid attitude so far as cooperation with the Left was concerned. Basically, it was an effort to retrieve its position lost as a result of the electoral victory of Bose. In a subsequent correspondence with Gandhi, Bose regarded it as both undemocratic and unconstitutional.² It certainly told upon the prestige of all concerned. It constitutes a sad chapter in our national movement. In the Subjects Committee, the C.S.P., the Communists and the Royists had all opposed the motion, but in the open session, the C.S.P. leaders remained neutral, while the Communists and the Royists opposed it. Jai Prakash Narain observed that on the previous night the Congress Socialists and the Communists had together decided to be neutral but the Communists suddenly changed their views in the session itself. He maintained that they remained neutral because of the assurances given by Pandit Pant that the resolution did not mean a vote of no-confidence in Bose. Narain disclosed that before formulating their policy in respect of the Pant Resolution they had an assurance from Bose also that he did not re-

1. *Presidential Address to Tripuri Congress, 1939.*
2. Bose : *Crossroads*, p. 128.

gard it as a vote of no-confidence in himself.¹ Another factor that weighed with them was the unity of the Congress. They felt that to oppose the resolution was to face the eventuality of a split in the Congress.² They had not regarded the Presidential election as a contest between the Left and the Right.

A bet noire with Bose had been the question of giving an ultimatum to the Government with a time-limit, failing which, national struggle was to be resumed with a redoubled vigour. After his return from Europe he started advocating the idea that a World War was soon to break out and that India should take advantage of it in favour of freedom because it would be a moment of Britain's adversity. The Right was opposed to the ultimatum formula. The Congress Socialists also did not like the ultimatum formula. The C.S.P. leaders were of the view that giving a six months' ultimatum meant that the British Government would get the opportunity of crushing the movement launched without adequate preparation even before the War broke out and landed the Government in trouble. At the Congress Jai Prakash Narain introduced a resolution on National Demands which had been prepared by Nehru. It was supported by Narendra Deva, but Sarat Chandra Bose, the brother of Subhas Chandra Bose, opposed it, characterising it as nothing but empty words, vague phrases and pious platitudes. His own resolution on National Demands was ruled out of order by Azad who was presiding.

The Congress adopted this resolution on 'National Demands' amidst uproarious scenes. It reiterated its rejection of the Federal scheme and declared that the Congress would organise a struggle against it, if it were introduced; though it did not indicate as to what would happen if it was not inaugurated or if its inauguration was delayed. It held that the time was ripe for full self-determination to India. It renewed its pledge of independence and to have

1. J. P. Narain : *The Congress Socialist Party (in Hindi)*, p. 34.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

a constitution for free India framed through a Constituent Assembly elected by the people and without interference by a foreign authority. It called upon Congressmen to work steadfastly, and with a sense of unity and discipline for the speedy realization of this objective.

The Break up of Left Unity

The Tripuri Congress, which saw the high water mark of the Left-Wing inside the Congress, also marked its decline and disunity. It was a veritable Munich of the Indian Left in pre-independent India. For four years the Left groups had worked in a united manner on many issues, and the election of Bose to the Presidentship of the Tripuri Congress was a measure of its strength, though the election had not been fought on the issue of Right vrs. the Left but of anti-constitutionalism and anti-compromise posture. But it had not been under a united leadership, was riven with internal dissensions and when it came to deciding issues at critical and crucial moments it could not come to an agreement. Nor did it show tact and patience. Tripuri Congress showed both its strength and its weakness. After the election of Bose it became clear that the issue was hanging between split or unity, and the Left, at an anti-compromise conference held in Calcutta on the eve of the Tripuri Congress, had decided in favour of unity and in favour of left-consolidation. But how was unity to be preserved? On this crucial point the Left was not agreed. It also did not anticipate the action of the Right which increasingly heightened its offensive against the Left. It was divided on the Pant resolution. While maintaining that Tripuri was 'a defeat for us' Bose later admitted that this defeat was made possible due to the 'betrayal of the C.S.P.' and some 'bunglings in tactics on our side'.¹

In a statement J. P. Narain maintained that his Party was not against the Congress leadership and that its concern was only with the policies and programme of the

1. Bose : *Crossroads*, p. 113.

Congress. His party stood for a composite leadership.¹ Therefore, he condemned the Pant resolution except that portion which expressed faith in Gandhi's leadership. He accused the rightists for forcing the split and praised the left generally for showing considerable restraint. He advised Bose not to take any hasty action. He also offered his Party's cooperation to him in the difficult tasks ahead. Against the accusations from critics Narain clarified that they had not broken any pre-election pact with Bose.²

The C.S.P. leaders held that their primary allegiance was to the National Congress and to the goal of national freedom. Therefore, they strictly followed the discipline of the Congress even where they were overruled. While striving to broaden the base of the Congress and to direct its energies on what seemed to them a truly revolutionary path, they at the same time maintained national unity. They simultaneously emphasized the unity of the C.S.P.

But there were differences inside the C.S.P. over the neutralist stand. At the Delhi C.S.P. Conference many speakers accused the leaders of vacillation and for betrayal of the whole past of the C.S.P.³ The rank and file was in a state of bewilderment as it had expected the leadership to carry the responsibility of left leadership to its logical end by voting against the Pant Resolution. The Meerut and the Faizpur theses demanded such a line of action. The Pant Resolution stood for a negation of unity. But the C.S.P. leaders insisted that unity was the prime need of the hour. The leaders were in favour of moving the entire Congress. They also argued that the struggle would not be effective without Gandhijee's association with it.⁴ The left was weak and divided and was not in a position to initiate and lead the struggle single-handed. Further, amidst rising tendencies towards Fascism, communalism and reactionism the unity of the Congress was to be emphasized.

1. *Indian Annual Register*, Vol. II, p. 5.

2. Narain : *The C.S.P.*, p. 32.

3. *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, p. 361.

4. N. Dev : *Opt. Cit.*, p. 133.

The Communists, similarly, showed signs of indecision and vacillation. They had urged the re-election of Bose as early as in October, 1938. They had voted for Bose; they had voted against the Pant Resolution but they also maintained that they were for a composite leadership, while at the same time they were opposed to the Gandhian leadership. They regarded the victory of Bose as a victory against status quo and the policy of political drift, against Federation but also against disruption. It was a vote of the Congress, majority of whom were neither left nor right, but were for a struggle.¹ They held that a split must be avoided. Neither they nor the left as a whole were against the Right as such. The common enemy of all of them was imperialism and against this common enemy they all must march together.² On the eve of the Tripuri Congress both J. P. Narain and P. C. Joshi had appealed for unity. The National Front brought out a special at the time of the Tripuri Congress wherein there was a call from prominent Communists for all-round unity and advance. The Communists, therefore, advanced the slogan of United Leadership for a United Front. They, therefore, rejected Roy's slogan of an alternative leadership. This did not mean that they recognised revolutionary leadership in Gandhi; it meant acceptance of the fact of the United Front. To demand elimination of the existing leadership was to demand elimination of the national bourgeoisie from the struggle.³ This bourgeoisie was not revolutionary but it was not counter-revolutionary either. They also criticised Roy for making a fun of the doctrine of an all-embracing national unity. He had forgotten his own formulations in 'Our differences' that the Congress was a United Front of the Indian people. They held the League of Radical Congressmen to be a sectarian body. Like the C.S.P. and Nehru they maintained that had the

1. *National Front*, February 5, 1939.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Adhikari* : *Royism exposed, Inverted Rightism*, in *National Front*, 23rd April, 1939.

Socialists and Communists advanced the slogan of an alternative leadership together with Bose, the result would have been a more turn to the Right. They also agreed that the left alone was not in a position to start the struggle. They partly blamed Bose for the debacle of the left at Tripuri.¹

Roy was of the view that there should be adequate and effective preparation before launching a struggle. But he agreed with Bose that the Right leadership was incapable of waging a struggle, compromise being the essence of Gandhism. The Gandhian technique of struggle would not yield any fruitful results. The first thing necessary was to transform the Congress into a fit instrument for revolutionary struggle by providing an alternative leadership. Unless this was done, no revolution should be launched because it would not succeed. He ridiculed the dream of proletarian leadership of the national struggle. His conception of leadership was that of revolutionary jacobinism, of the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie. He thus did not favour class-organizations of workers and peasants for national struggle.² Roy held : "Before we can put any forward policy or advocate any radical change in the programme of our movement, internal affairs of the Congress must be built up as a powerful political organization free from all its present defects. Only after that it will be possible for us to raise more fundamental issues precipitating the final stage of struggle."³

In line with this attitude Roy criticised the communists and socialists for having collapsed at Tripuri and having surrendered to the Right. According to him this was a betrayal of revolutionary nationalism. According to Roy Bose's election meant taking initiative for an alternative leadership.⁴ But the left refused to make the Pant Resolution an occasion for a frontal attack against Gandhism and Gandhian leadership. But curiously enough Roy himself

1. *New Age*, April, 1939.

2. *Independent India*, 26-2-39.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Manifesto of the Radical Congressmen's League.*

did not lead such an attack against the Resolution. His only amendment to the Resolution was that the Right should cooperate with Bose.

Jawaharlal Nehru, under whose inspiration, though not under actual leadership and guidance, the Left inside the Congress had so far functioned, could not make up his mind for some time whether to side with the Left or with the Right. He was opposed to the Rightist policy of constitutionalism and compromise, if there was one, but was equally opposed to the Bose's idea of an ultimatum and immediate struggle. He was also opposed to any split in the Congress, the only national organization capable of conducting a struggle for freedom. Above all, he had his allegiance to Gandhi which he was not prepared to sacrifice for anything else. He also held that Gandhi's leadership of the Congress was well entrenched and he reminded Bose that in any open contest with Gandhism he was not likely to carry the Congress with him.¹ Moreover, he was sure that the impending national struggle, without Gandhijee's active participation, was not likely to be an effective one. He had also doubts whether, despite talk of socialism, Bose had clear-cut views on agrarian question and on foreign policy.² He also regarded the Federation issue as a dead one and held that the coming struggle should be on the basis of the demand for self-determination and for a Constituent Assembly. Further, the struggle should take place after due preparations and in correlation to the developing world crisis.³ As it was Nehru was able to influence the C.S.P., with whose leaders he had cordial personal relationships, towards moderation at Tripuri.

The spate of correspondence between Nehru and Bose threw a flood of lights on the personality of the two great leaders. Intellectually having a firmer root so far as his adhesion to socialism was concerned, Nehru moved

1. Letter to Bose, dated April 3, 1939, in Nehru : *A Bunch of old letters.*
2. Letter to Bose dated February 4, 1934, in Nehru : *A Bunch of old letters.*
3. Letter dated April 3, 1939.

cautiously in relation to the fast developing national politics, even at the risk of being called a compromising leader who had surrendered to the Right. Indeed at the Tripuri Congress there was considerable consternation among his followers over his stand. Having more emotional than intellectual attachment to socialism, Bose had a fiercely burning passion for national freedom in the realisation of which he was prepared to dive headlong irrespective of the circumstances and of results. Under the circumstances he regretted the fact that though he had treated Nehru with utmost regard and, politically as an elder brother, yet Nehru had developed tremendous dislike for him.¹ He went to the extent of saying that nobody had done more harm to him personally and to the cause he was championing than Nehru.² He accused Nehru of going back on his past. He failed to understand either his national or international politics. He spoke of distant goals and avoided immediate issues. The National Demand Resolution was a beautifully vague resolution. He was also for unity but this must be unity of action.³

Also, the mutual suspicions between the Congress Socialists and the Communists was fast growing, and they came almost to the breaking point. The Congress Socialists like Jai Prakash Narain, Narendra Dev and M. R. Masani have, from their points of view, narrated how the Communists, from the very beginning, started doing faction work inside the C.S.F. with a view to capture it,⁴ and how Socialist unity inside the C.S.P. came to a sorrowful end largely due to the factional, disruptionist, partisan work by the Communists who found in the C.S.P. a convenient legal co-

1. *Letter to Nerru dated March 28, 1939 in Nehru : A Bunch of old Letters.*
2. *Bose : Crossroads, p. 113.*
3. *Letter to Nehru dated March 28, 1939.*
4. *In September, 1938, Masani came across a plan of work prepared by the Communists early in 1938 and published it as the Communist Plot against the C.S.P. Jai Prakash Narain : The Socialist Unity, and the C.S.P., in Towards Struggle: Narendra Dev : Problems of Socialist Unity, in Socialism and National Revolution.*

ver under the conditions of illegality of the C.P.I., to spread their influence. By 1937-38 the C.S.P. had two communists, that is, Sajjad Zaheer and Namboodripad, as joint secretaries, and two others, that is, Z. A. Ahmad and Dr. Ashraf as Executive members. Moreover, Communists P. Sundarayya and P. Ramamurthi were in charge of the Andhra and Madras C.S.P. respectively. The differences between the C.P. and C.S.P. were even carried inside the student movement, and by 1938 there were two students' organizations, each calling itself All-India Students' Federation.

They have divided the relationship between the C.S.P. and the C.P.I. into three periods. The first covers the period from the birth of the C.S.P. to its Meerut Conference in January, 1936, during which period, as already noted, the Communists showed a hostile attitude towards the C.S.P.

The second covers the period from the Meerut Conference to August, 1937. As already mentioned, at Meerut Conference the C.S.P. opened its doors to the Communists, but unity with them was really achieved at the time of the Lucknow Congress, though differences on the question of international affiliation still persisted. Narain avers that although at Meerut it was laid down that the Communists would be admitted with the express permission of the National Executive, yet in practice this was not done, with the result that a large number of Communists entered the Party in the first unity year. Soon, however, differences arose on the questions of (a) factional work by the Communists, (b) their determination not to allow any rivals in the trade union field, and (c) their assertion that the C.S.P. was not developing along a truly Marxist line. There were complaints to this effect from Andhra and from the labour centres in Cawnpur, Bombay and Calcutta. Situation dragged on in this uneasy manner till August, 1937 when the National Executive met at Patna. At this meeting a statement on the C.S.P., said to have emanated from the C.P.I., was placed before the members. It maintained that the C.S.P. was not a Socialist Party, that the C.P.I. was

the only real Socialist Party and that the C.S.P. was to be developed merely into a platform of left-unity. According to Narain this knocked the whole basis of the Lucknow agreement that both the C.S.P. and the C.P.I. were sister socialist parties which, in course of time, and following certain policies of cooperation, would unite to form a single socialist party. The Executive took the decision that in future no communists would be taken into the C.S.P. but no decision was taken to expel those already inside it. It also resolved to continue the United Front with the Reds.¹ But the United Front did not mean that members of one party were to be admitted in the other.

The third period starts from August, 1937 and lasted till the outbreak of the War. During this period the relationship between the two further deteriorated. A landmark during the period was the Lahore Conference of the Party held in April, 1938. It was being presided over by Masani who, after his second visit to the Soviet Union, had, in a series of articles in the Party journal, criticised some of the failings of the Soviet regime under Stalin, as well as the tactics of the Communists in France. At the Conference the Communists brought a note to the Executive which maintained that the C.P. considered the C.S.P. to be a true revolutionary party and that Socialist Unity would be brought about only by a unity of the two parties. But they also focussed their ideological differences in the form of an alternative thesis which later became famous as the Zaheer-Batliwala-Dinkar thesis and which purported to develop the C.S.P. as a Marxist Party. They also submitted an alternative list of the Executive for election with Narain as General Secretary but majority of the members as Communists. This was a rival to the list which Narain himself had submitted and in which the Communists were given one-third strength. Narain's list was adopted by a narrow majority. It is noteworthy that despite these differences the resolu-

1. *The statement of the Executive Committee of the A.I.C.S.P.*

tion of the Lahore Conference on socialist unity considered the C.S.P. and the Red group as the two main Marxist Socialist parties and held that care should be taken to bring them together in a spirit of cooperation and comradeship.¹

In the document published by Masani, the Reds had maintained that the composition and character of the All-India Contact Committee was to be changed on a parity basis between the Communists and the Socialists. While the unity of the C.S.P. was to be maintained, it was to be developed into a mass socialist party, with flexible organisational form and loose discipline, on the basis of the Zahcer-Batliwala-Dinkar thesis, ultimately ensuring the majority of the Marxists-Communists in all its organizations.² But this was to be pursued patiently, cautiously and tactfully.

Drift and paralysis in the Party continued; the Executive did not take any action and in 1939 some members of the Executive like Masani, Lohia, Mehta and Patwardhan resigned from the Executive in protest.

The question was discussed by the Executive again in 1939. Most members were in favour of expelling the communists but the decision was left to the General Secretary, who, however, advised against expulsion.

Indeed there was something wrong in the nature of the relationship between the Communists and the C.S.P. Though the C.P.I. was illegal, yet the basis of the United Front between the two was their organizational independence, while they were to cooperate on specific issues. In September, 1938 Narendra Dev made an offer on behalf of the C.S.P. to merge both the C.P. and the C.S.P. and form one party but it was not accepted by the Reds. They held that for merger a precondition was complete agreement on the ultimate questions of means and ends and on questions

1. *Resolutions of the Lahore Conference.*

2. *M. R. Masani : The Communist Plot against the C.S.P., in the Indian Communist Party Documents (1930-1956).*

of immediate tasks.¹ But the odd part of it was that the Communists were also admitted into the C.S.P. This was realized later by the C.S.P. leaders who were against the inclusion of the communists in the C.S.P., when, they argued that the C.S.P. was a political party and not a joint front or a national parliament, embracing various sections and classes.² Against the argument advanced by the Communists that the C.S.P. should be developed as a platform of Left unity, they held that a 'party of socialist unity is a contradiction in terms.'³ The proletarianisation of the C.S.P. advocated by the communists could not be a mechanically hastened process.

Difficulties in the United Front with the Communists arose also because of the continued pretensions of its leaders, as also induced by the Party thesis, that the C.S.P. was a Marxian Socialist Party, although in fact there was already the beginning of the gradual abandonment of the Marxian tenets.

Indeed as years passed by the Gandhian elements inside the C.S.P. started asserting themselves, and forced a process of rethinking on the relation of socialism to Gandhism. During 1939-45, as we shall see, the Congress Socialists moved fast near Gandhijee.

In an article in the Party's paper Patwardhan called for a restatement of policy by forthrightly stating that although it sought to broaden and develop the Congress, yet it adhered to the Congress' fundamental policy of peaceful and legitimate means.⁴ He deprecated ill-informed and unreasoned attack on Gandhism. There was much that was common between Gandhism and Socialism.

The August, 1937 statement of the Reds on the C.S.P. referred to earlier held that the C.S.P. was not a Marxist

1. *The Congress Socialist*, June 18, 1939.

2. *Dev : Socialism and the National Revolution*, p. 118.

3. *Ibid*, p. 119.

4. A. Patwardhan : *Need for a restatement of Policy*, in the *Congress Socialist*, April 9, 1939.

Socialist Party.¹ It regarded the C.S.P. as the growing organizational expression of Left unity and looked to its future line of development as a mass party, not with the rigid discipline of one-class party but with an organizational structure which corresponded to the unification of all left forces. Naturally the doors of the C.S.P. were to be opened to all active anti-imperialists who accepted the aim of socialism and were willing to carry out the programme of left unity. The confusion in the left was due to the failure to organise a Mass Socialist Party. This should not be denied on the plea of preserving the non-existent homogeneity of the C.S.P. There were fundamental agreements between the two sections and the interests of the national movement demanded unity and united action.

In an article, entitled Unity is Strength, in the Party's journal, the Congress Socialist, Communist S. Zaheer denied that the Reds were trying to capture the C.S.P. and reiterated the Communist stand that the two main streams of the socialist movement, that is the communist one arising from the working class and the C.S.P. one arising in the National Congress, must be rapidly brought closer together. For this the Reds must be freely admitted in the C.S.P.² The Communists criticised the anti-communists like Masani for systematically urging the expulsion of the Reds on the plea of maintaining the homogeneity of the C.S.P.

Despite protracted correspondence Gandhi and Bose could not arrive at an agreement, Gandhi having adopted a rigid uncompromising, non-cooperative attitude.

At a meeting of the A.I.C.C. held at Calcutta in April-May, 1939, Bose reported failure of his efforts to constitute a composite Working Committee in consultation with Gandhi and offered to resign.

1. *Statement of the B.P.T.U.C. on the CSP (1938).*
2. *The Congress Socialist, March 5, 1938.*

Nehru appealed to him not to resign. So also was the advice of the C.S.P. leaders. J. P. Narain criticised the unjustified and undignified attitude of the Right in not co-operating with Bose. Their suggestion was that Bose should continue on the basis of the Working Committee that existed in the previous year. Nehru was prepared to be General Secretary in that case.¹

But Bose had felt deeply hurt at the attitude of the Right and he preferred to resign.

Rajendra Prasad was then elected President. He chose an exclusively rightist Working Committee in which not only other leftists but even Nehru and Bose declined seats.

The tactics adopted by the Right has evoked uncharitable remarks from a contemporary leftist : "The malice and cunning of the right-wing leadership was hardly ever so well-displaced It is indeed an unsavoury episode; the means adopted to achieve Gandhi's aim, namely, removal of Bose from the Congress presidentship, were, it must be said, rather low for the great man."²

Birth of the Forward Bloc and after

On 3rd May, 1939 Bose announced the formation of the Forward Bloc inside the Congress whose declared aim was 'to rally radical and anti-imperialist elements within the Congress'. Like the C.S.P. it was a grouping within the Congress and only Congressmen were entitled to be members of the Bloc, but unlike the C.S.P. it did not consist only of socialists but of left nationalists in general who were interested in its programme. Announcing its formation, Bose called for an active struggle. He urged development of a rebel mentality. He also expressed faith in Mahatma Gandhi and held that he was only against the compromising Right leadership. Bose took pains to emphasize that their task was to convert the Congress and not to desert it. In respect of Gandhism it has, however, to be remembered that Bose never placed a blind, unquestioning

1. Narain : C.S.P., p. 36.

2. H. Mukherjee : *Gandhijee, a study*, p. 121.

faith in Gandhi and Gandhism. Indeed the youth in Bengal were influenced more by the revolutionary tradition and though they had respect for Gandhi but they never gave him total allegiance. Apart from this Bose had a burning passion for the freedom of the country which he wanted to secure quickly by any means. The complexion of the Bloc, thus, was at slight variance with the attitude of Bose adopted at the Haripura Congress where he maintained that a leftist bloc could have *raison d'être* only if it were socialist in character, though he had acknowledged even then that socialism was not an immediate problem.

Justifying the formation of the Forward Bloc Bose said that the same inner urge for national freedom, which gave birth to the Indian National Congress, was primarily responsible for the birth of the Forward Bloc. "Neither personal factors nor accidental circumstances can account for this new phenomenon in Indian politics".¹ Bose maintained. Factional differences had nothing to do with its formation. It had come into existence because the Congress must enter on a new phase in its evolutionary process. Bose even brought in the Hegelian Dialectics to explain that progress takes place through conflict. Organizational development invariably necessitates the appearance and growth of a left-wing

Bose also tried to disarm those critics of his, including leftist ones, who argued that the unity of the national movement was to be maintained at all costs. According to him a distinction had to be made between real unity and false unity. In the then existing circumstances the slogan of unity at any price and under all circumstances was a convenient slogan for those who had lost dynamism and revolutionary urge.² He felt hurt that even the leftists decried the Bloc.³ He criticised those leftists who talked of revolution and overthrow of Gandhism but surrendered to the first rightist rebuke.

1. *Crossroads. Why Forward Bloc?* p. 174.

2. *Ibid*, p. 175.

3. *Op. Cit.*, p. 185.

Bose complained that though between 1936-38 the left-wing inside the Congress had grown and developed as a result of the cooperation with the right, yet in September, 1938 the right first gave the red signal that cooperation with the left was no longer possible and that the left was becoming too noisy and troublesome to cooperate with. This policy reached climax in 1939 when the right-wing deliberately decided to end cooperation with the left.¹ At the Calcutta A.I.C.C. meeting the left wanted to cooperate with the right and gave slogan of a composite leadership but this was spurned by the right which wanted complete surrender by the left.

Even as early as the Haripura Congress he had shown his preference for the leftists of socialist character being consolidated into one party. It was immaterial whether such a bloc was called a group, league or party. Had the C.S.P. moved on right lines, the Bloc would not have been necessitated, but after Haripura Congress the C.S.P. showed no signs of mobility. The divided left, with their petty differences and dissensions, were actually losing ground after Haripura. After Haripura, in discussions with the Socialists and the Communists, it was felt that all progressive, radical and anti-imperialist elements in the Congress, should be organised on the basis of a common minimum programme. It was felt that this left-bloc would resist the onslaught of the Right and would prepare the soil for a Marxist Party.² It was also discussed at the left conference in Calcutta early in 1939 but nothing tangible came out.

The time had, therefore, come for the left-wing to differentiate itself from the right and proceed to consolidate itself, with a view to securing a majority in the Congress and then proceeding to resume the struggle for independence in the name of the Congress. The Forward Bloc had come into existence, to fulfil this task.³ Any one

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Bose : Crossroads, p. 179.*

3. *Ibid, p. 176.*

of the then existing parties could have accepted this role of left-consolidation, but petty differences and dissensions divided the left, and, therefore, this could not come through. According to Bose it then became indispensably necessary to inaugurate the Forward Bloc with the help of fresh elements from the left. The Bloc thus was a historical necessity.

Left-consolidation, winning over the majority in the Congress, and resumption of the national struggle—these represented the three-fold task before the Forward Bloc and before the Left in the Congress.¹ Bose held that the Congress had to be saved from the clutches of the Right which had given up the idea of a struggle, and was thinking in terms of constitutionalism and reformism. Only the left could preserve the revolutionary character of the Congress. The Forward Bloc was to rally all progressive, radical and anti-imperialist elements in the Congress, whether they were socialists or not.

Both the C.S.P. and the Royists expressed their opposition to the Bloc as they felt that it arose on personal grounds and had no political or ideological basis. Roy said that he had still to be convinced whether the Bloc had any reason to exist. Roy also apprehended that the Bloc might go out of the Congress.

J. P. Narain criticised it as a hastily taken step. The C.S.P. felt that there must be an ideological basis for any bloc. They maintained that they could not join the Bloc, but would cooperate with it on specific issues.

The Communists could not make up their minds for sometime but in the end they came out against it. Writing in the *New Age* of May, 1939 R. D. Bhardwaj held that it might be a disruptive move. They also became suspicious of the Bloc because it did not make any fundamental criticism of the constitution, creed, policy and programme of the Congress but only expressed dissatisfaction with the existing Right leadership. Bose's method continued to be satyagraha

1. Bose : *Op. Cit.*, p. 180.

or non-violent non-cooperation in the widest sense of the term.¹ Though Bose wanted the Left to organise and discipline all radical elements in the Congress on a clear-cut programme but he did not evolve such a programme. Indeed, the Bloc had no positive programme. It accepted Gandhian policy and programme. They feared that the Bloc would lead to a split in the Congress and would thus block the revolutionary road to freedom.²

Among the manifold factors responsible for the suspicion about the Bloc among other leftists was the statement of Bose in his *Indian Struggle* wherein he had urged a synthesis of Fascism and Communism, wherefrom they construed his softness for Fascism. And this despite the fact that in an interview with R. Palme Dutt, early in 1938, Bose had denied that he was a fascist. He held that the expression 'a synthesis between Communism and Fascism' used in his *Indian Struggle* was not a happy one. Moreover, when he was writing that book Fascism had not started on its imperialist expedition and it appeared to him merely as an aggressive form of nationalism.³ Carrying the tradition of the earlier nationalists like Dadabhai Naorojee and Tilak, Bose held that there was nothing wrong in securing help from any country, irrespective of its social system and without being influenced by that system, for the sake of freedom of India. However, Leftism as it had developed in India from the late twenties had assumed a strong anti-Fascist bias and in this prevalent mood, despite clarifications from Bose, misgivings among the leftists on this score persisted. As referred earlier, this was one of the points of differences between Nehru and Bose.

In a joint statement after the formation of the Bloc Jai Prakash Narain and P. C. Joshi analysed the political situation in relation to the crisis of the national leadership

1. Bose : *Crossroads*, p. 10.

2. S. Lahiri : *The Forward Bloc, in the National Front*, 21st May, 1939.

3. *Crossroads*, p. 30; p. 136.

and regretted that Tripuri's call for a nation-wide struggle remained a dead letter. They lamented the way the Rajkot affairs were tackled.¹

But they also held that the Bloc was a wrong move. They admitted that left-consolidation, albeit voluntary one, was the need of the hour, but the 'exclusive and sectarian' Forward Bloc would not lead to such a consolidation. According to them the Congress was not a parliament where opposing parties must try to oust one another from power; on the contrary, it was a front the unity of which must not be impaired.² They suggested a consultative conference at the time of the Bombay A.I.C.C. to devise machinery and programme for left-consolidation. But this programme was not to be sectarian and it must aim at maintaining the unity of the Congress and at achieving a united leadership. They did not treat it as an anti-Right bloc. An all-India Left Coordination Committee might be formed at this conference.

The programme of this Left-Consolidation, according to them, was to include implementing the National Demand, anti-War and anti-Fascist resolutions of the Congress, development of the States' people's struggle, organization of workers and peasants, fight against communal reaction and democratisation of the Congress.

While elucidating it J. P. Narain maintained that his Party was always against any organizational crystallisation of the left-wing inside the Congress.³

From the middle of June, 1939, both the Socialists and the Communists expressed their willingness to work with the Bloc on an agreed basis.

The changed attitude on the part of the Communists could be seen in the editorial in the National Front dated 11th June, 1939 on the Unity of the Left. The Bloc was no longer regarded as a disruptive move. It represented con-

1. J. P. Narain and P. C. Joshi's statement on the Forward Bloc and Left Unity, in the *Congress Socialist*, June 18, 1939.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

solidation of left nationalists, of Congressmen who were not Socialists or Communists. It was thus an ally with which there could be an United Front. In fact, the Bloc was not regarded as a Party but an alliance and as such its membership could not be individual but on the basis of parties. The decisions therein must be by mutual agreement and not by a majority. The Bloc must be a real fighting alliance which would unite the entire Congress, and work politically and not factionally.

There was some dilly-dallying on the part of the Bloc but ultimately the Socialists and Communists proposed the constitution of a Left Consolidation Committee on the following basis : (1) Unity of the Congress to be the aim of the Left-consolidation, (2) A plan of struggle, the perspective of which was a national struggle through the Congress, (3) Bloc to be regarded as a bloc and not as a party, (4) It would have collective as well as individual membership; the C.S.P., the C.P. and the Royists to join the Bloc as parties; individual membership was not to be more than one-third, (5) Representation of the Parties was to be by the respective Party Executives.

At a conference on 22nd June, 1939, the Bloc decided that it be organised as a Party and it should join the L.C.C. as a unit. This conference also adopted what it described its principles, policy and programme.

Thus from the middle of June, 1939 the relation of the Forward Bloc with other Left Parties and groups assumed a cordial tone. Bose had wanted all leftists to merge their separate entities in one organization for the purpose of working an agreed minimum programme.¹ The existing parties or groups were not to be dissolved and they might function for the purpose of working any extra programme. But mutual distrusts precluded realisation of the merger on the basis of an agreed minimum programme. But Bose was also not in favour of permitting any Party or Group

1. Bose : *Opt. Cit.*, p. 200.

to allow its members to join the Forward Bloc individually. Left-consolidation was then attempted on the basis that the existing parties and groups would maintain their separate identity. The C.S.P., the National Front Group (i.e. the Communists), the Radical League and the Forward Bloc constituted the units of the Left-Consolidation Committee formed shortly before the Bombay A.I.C.C. meeting. The units had the same status and the Committee would act only when there was an unanimous agreement.¹

One of the first steps taken by the new Working Committee was to convene a meeting of the A.I.C.C. towards the end of June, 1939. It passed two important resolutions. One of these prohibited Congressmen from taking part in any form of Satyagraha without the prior sanction of the Provincial Committees. This was interpreted by the Left as an attempt to prevent left Congressmen from taking part in the peasants' struggle and the struggles for democracy in the States. It also made the Congress constitution more rigid and reduced the powers of the Provincial Committees to exercise control over Congress Ministries. Dr. Raj Kumar makes the comment that "on the whole it was an attempt at tightening up the loose ends of the organization, necessitated by the growing importance of the parliamentary activities."² Narendra Dev, who was a member of the Constitution Sub-Committee, observed in a note of dissent that it was meant to exclude all leftist groups from the Congress; for it authorised the Working Committee to exclude from the membership of the Congress those who were members of a communal or any other organization.³ The impact of the Left Consolidation Committee could easily be seen at the Bombay A.I.C.C. After the A.I.C.C. the L.C.C. met and formulated its future programme. It decided to observe July 9 as the All-India Day of protest and demonstration against the resolution of the

1. *Ibid.*

2. N. V. Raj Kumar : *Development of the Congress Constitution*, p. 92.

3. N. Dev : *Opt. Cit.*, pp. 110-12.

A.I.C.C. The L.C.C. reiterated its decision even after the statement of the Congress President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, threatening disciplinary action.

However, before the day of demonstration, M. N. Roy dissociated his League from it and the C.S.P. also showed hesitations, though the demonstrations were held under the L.C.C.

For participation in the July 9 protestations and demonstrations Bose was disqualified by August 9 meeting of the Working Committee of the Congress from the presidency of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and from holding any office in the Congress for three years with effect from August, 1939. Narain and other leftists deprecated the expulsion.

Looking in retrospect it appears that Bose's action in forming the Forward Bloc was a hastily taken one. It killed all hopes of unity in the Congress. Since his dignified stand at the April meeting of the A.I.C.C., Bose had regained the ground lost at Tripuri and had he shown more patience and forbearance, he would have rallied many to his side and would have exposed the hollowness of the Right. As it was, he rather overplayed his hands and the Right struck hard against him. Even in his Haripura address, though he had urged the leftist groups to democratise the Congress and reorganise it on the broadest anti-imperialist basis but he was also in favour of rallying the whole country under the banner of the Congress. Moreover, as days passed by it was found that Bose did not initiate the promised struggle for civil liberties, nor did he show the path of action for which he had criticized the Right. Instead, he indulged in vendetta against the Right, though not without provocation and talked of an alternative leadership. The threatened disunity of the national movement alarmed many who would have otherwise supported him. To be fair to Bose it must, however, be remembered that even after his virtual expulsion from the Congress he, in a statement dated the 19th August, 1939, appealed to maintain

unity of the Congress and resolved to resume the struggle in the name of the Congress.

Bose indeed swore by socialism but his socialism, like that of Nehru, did not owe allegiance to any hide-bound system. Socialism, according to him, must be built up on the basis of Indian history and culture and traditions; though it was to borrow from other schools of socialism, and was indeed to be a synthesis. But beyond these generalisations as to his synthesised socialism, he also gave a blue-print of socialist reconstruction in independent India in his address to the Haripura Congress (1938) wherein he favoured a radical reform of the land system, abolition of landlordism, liquidation of agricultural indebtedness, provision for cheap credit facilities for rural population, extension of the cooperative movement. He favoured a comprehensive scheme of industrial development under state-ownership and state-control. He supported gradual socialisation of entire agricultural and industrial system in the spheres of both production and appropriation.

The situation was in a fluid state when the World War II broke out. Looking back it appears queer that the left-right squabble was permitted to muddle the sanguine waters of our national movement. Mukherjee speaks of this state of affairs: "So with Jawaharlal Nehru fretting uneasily in the company of right-wing leaders and Bose unable to give concrete shape to his leftism, the country sulked and sorrowed, and lacked a dynamic leadership when War broke out in 1939."

Formation of splinter Left Groups

The Tripuri Congress marked the beginning not only of the end of left-unity which had been pain-stakingly built on a shaky foundation but it also brought to the surface new shades of Leftism.

Bolshevik Party of India: We have already referred to the Labour Party of N. Dutt Mazumdar, formed in the early thirties, which later merged with the C.P.I. for all practical purposes. But at Tripuri, after the neutrality of the Communists and

their vacillations and hesitations in respect to the Congress, Gandhism and the tasks facing the national struggle, some leftists like Sisir Roy, Ajit Roy, Bishwanath Dube, Promode Das Gupta and Dutt Mazumdar etc. came out of the C.P.I. and formed the Bolshevik Party of India in 1939 with Mazumdar as its Secretary.¹ These leaders had supported Bose at Tripuri. Its leaders criticised the Communists for not joining the Forward Bloc, and for temporising with the Congress Right. In regard to Gandhi also they maintained that, though he was a popular leader, yet his politics were guided by the interests of the bourgeoisie.

The Bolshevik Party, in reality, was an underground wing of the Labour Party and remained so for a considerable length of time.

Like the Revolutionary Communist Party of India, the Bolshevik Party was a splinter group formed by dissident Communists.² According to its founders it arose out of the necessity of a Working Class Party firmly rooted in the masses and loyal to the principles of Marxism-Leninism. The official Communist Party of India, according to them, had failed to provide that basis. In theory it could agree to all the principles of Marxism-Leninism but could not carry them into practice. It had reduced Dimitrov's thesis on United Front to the "base theory of class-collaboration with the reactionary Gandhian leadership of the bourgeois Congress."³ Whatever their professions the Communists in practice had acted as the propagandists of the Congress viewpoint and their policy had been to "protect the bourgeois leadership from the fury of the masses, and to fight against those who would advocate a militant independent policy of the working class." M. N. Roy also had abandoned Marxism-Leninism in as much as he was of the opinion that the working class in India was yet undeveloped and, therefore, there was no need of a Working Class Party.

1. *Interview with K. P. Ghose on January 2, 1965.*

2. *For an account of it see, Bolshevik Party of India : Indian Politics (1941-44) : G. S. Bhargava : Leaders of the Left, Vol. II.*

3. *Opt. Cit. Introduction.*

The C.S.P. was a reformist left appendage of the Congress and the bourgeoisie.

The contention of its founders was that the Bolshevik Party was the Party of the Indian Working Class par excellence. It believed that the impending national struggle, which would be fought under the leadership of the working class, would take the form of a violent, revolutionary, uncompromising struggle against imperialism. It called upon the rank and file of the C.P.I. to revolt against the leadership and establish a proletarian hegemony.

The Communists were bitterly critical of the politics of Mazumdar and his Party. They maintained that although, in theory talking of Marxism-Leninism and the proletarian leadership but, in reality, Mazumdar was only interested in the disruption of the Congress and the emergence of a Left Congress, with the collective affiliation of peasants, workers and students.¹ Mazumdar wanted the proletariat to follow Bose. Political action by the working class had no place in his politics. He held that the political struggle of the working class was being waged by the radical petty-bourgeoisie, led by declassed socialist intellectuals.² This really amounted to subservience to left nationalism. Leadership, according to him, was not to be won by struggle, not by the proletariat moving the masses politically on the path of struggle. It was almost vacant because of bankruptcy of Gandhism, what was needed was to occupy it. In the National Congress he saw not the masses of people but only compromising leaders. In practice Mazumdar repudiated the line of proletarian struggle.

The Revolutionary Socialist Party of India : Though the R.S.P.I. as an independent entity was formed only in 1940, but its beginnings could be traced from this period. Among those who initiated this process were : Jogesh Chatterjee, Tridib Chaudhari, Thakur Haribans Singh, Keshava Pd. Sharma, etc. Chatterjee was born of a middle

1. *The C.P.I. : His Master's Voice (The Politics of N. Dutt Mazumdar).*
2. *Ibid.*

class family of Commilla district of East Bengal. Chatterjee belonged to that early batch of terrorists of the first decade of the present century from which M. N. Roy also came. When the "Anusilan Samity" was formed in 1905, Chatterjee came in contact with it and gave up his studies. He was arrested in 1916 and remained in prison till 1920. After his release he was the virtual guide of the Anusilan Samity. Like some of his fellow terrorists he came under the influence of Marxism and of the Russian Revolution. But he could not be a quick convert. He had still faith in the National Congress. In 1921 he established the "House of Labourers" at Commilla; still believing in the violent overthrow of the foreign rule. In 1922 he was in charge of the U.P. branch of the Samity which later became known as the Hindusthan Republican Association. He was arrested in 1924. In 1930 he was again arrested for taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement and remained in jail till 1937 when he was released by the Congress Ministry. Many recruits to socialism in India at this period were those who had read Marxist and Socialist literature in prison and it was during his long period of imprisonment that Chatterjee became a convinced Socialist. He gradually lost faith in the programme of the National Congress.

The genesis of the formation of the Party can be traced to 1937-38 when Jogesh Chatterjee, who was subsequently to become the founder-Secretary of the Party, was released. He and his associates had become converts to socialism, and Marxian Socialism for that, though not of any orthodox variety. As the C.S.P. at this stage, professed faith in Marxism-Leninism, these leaders found in it a fit instrument for work. Jai Prakash Narain's assurance, that the C.S.P. would be converted into a Marxist Party, was an added attraction for them. They, thus, joined the C.S.P. and started work inside it from 1938 onwards.¹ But they started as a group inside the C.S.P. and in September, 1938 they even adopted a thesis which main-

1. *Interview with Ram Krishna Pathak on 2-1-65.*

tained that the revolutionary socialists would organise themselves on radical lines. It favoured a revolution, albeit violent one, which would include workers, poor peasants and middle class intelligentsia, though the proletariat was viewed as the only consistently revolutionary class.¹ Most of the members of the Party hailed from the Anushilan Samity.

Differences between the C.S.P. and the R.S.P. started from the Tripuri Congress where the Revolutionary Socialists fully supported Bose and continued to do so for long; whereas on the Pant resolution the C.S.P. remained neutral. They were also becoming disillusioned at the impotency of the C.S.P. leaders in leading the Party on a Marxist path. After Tripuri the R.S.P. men reorganised themselves and came more emphatically against Gandhism and its technique of struggle and in favour of a violent, militant revolution.² Like some other Left parties and groups they stood for a Constituent Assembly, nationalisation of key industries, abolition of native states etc.

The Revolutionary Communist Party of India

Though as an independent Left Party the R.C.P.I. could be formed only in 1942 but its beginnings can be traced to the year 1934 when, dissatisfied with the tactics adopted by the Indian Communists in relation to the national struggle and also discontented with the Communist International line, some leftists, who called themselves communists, albeit revolutionary ones, started differentiating themselves from the C.P.I. and constituted themselves into a Communist League. Among the leaders were Saumyendra Nath Tagore, Sudhir Das Gupta and Panna Lal Das Gupta. Their actual quarrels with the C.P.I. date back to 1932-33 when they criticised the ultra-left policies of the C.P.I. and its isolation from the national movement.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

Internationally they looked askance at Stalinism, and gave the impression that they were Trotskyites.¹

In the previous chapters frequent references were made to Tagore, and to his activities in India and abroad. Born of an upper middle class family in Bengal in 1901, Tagore took his B.A. degree in the same year in which Gandhi launched the Non-Cooperation Movement. Like so many other young educated Indians, he enthusiastically took part in that movement but, as with other Left leaders, he witnessed its withdrawal with great surprise and disappointment. It was at this stage that the ideals of the Revolution in Russia came to his rescue and he gradually found himself in the lap of Marxism-Leninism. He became convinced that the weakness of the non-cooperation movement was due to the non-participation of the masses in it, and he made up his mind to eliminate the predominance of the middle class in the national movement and to convert it into a purely proletarian revolution. Anti-Gandhism and Marxism-Leninism became the two strands of all his subsequent thinking and writings. To this were added his bias against Stalin and, what he called, the Stalinist communists in India.

But as the history of the Communist Party of India shows, the path from nationalism to Marxism-Leninism was strewn with many difficulties of an exploratory nature. However, as already stated, Tagore associated himself with the Communist Party of India, and later, he joined the Workers' and Peasants' Party. He attended the Sixth World Congress of the C.I. held in Moscow in 1928 and was able to impress upon the leaders of the C.I. that M. N. Roy had virtually betrayed the Communist Party of India by his insistence upon a petty-bourgeoisie Peoples' Party. Since, at that conference, the C.I. itself decided to emphasize the independence and leadership of the proletariat and its party in the national movement, Tagore's view of a prole-

1. *This accusation was denied by both Tagore and the present young, energetic leader of the R.C.P.I., Sudhin Kumar, in separate interviews to the author.*

tarian revolution found ready acceptance. Due to the launching of the Meerut Conspiracy Case against the Communists, Tagore did not return to India till 1934. During the interval he studied Marxism at the Moscow Institute and visited many West European countries. In France he was for some time associated with the revolutionary syndicalists, which association, however, left an indelible impress upon him. He also joined the Anti-Fascist League founded by Romain Rolland. He visited Germany where he was arrested for his utterances against Hitler but was later released. While in Germany he had criticised the early soft attitude of the Communists towards Nazism.

When he reached India in 1934, he found the Communists isolated from the national movement, and split from the A.I.T.U.C. He and his associates were of the view that as Communists they should participate in all struggles even though they were started by the bourgeoisie and the Congress. But Tagore was bitterly against the entry of the Communists into the National Congress, which he characterised as a bourgeois organization. When, in pursuance of the resolutions of the Seventh Congress, the Communists decided to enter the Congress, and develop it as an anti-imperialistic organ Tagore left the Party and formed the Communist League, generally known as "Ganabani". The Ganabani Publishing House was also established. Among Tagore's writings of this period one finds a crusade against Gandhism, a trenchant criticism of the Congress Socialists and Communists and his own idea of a Bourgeois Democratic Revolution in India.

The Revolutionary Communists regarded the Congress as a mass organization of the bourgeoisie and were hostile to its programme and to its leaders. They claimed that unlike other left groups, they alone never worked inside the Congress and only allowed some of their members to work inside it to do faction work, to expose the leaders and to fraternise with the rank and file.¹

1. *Interview with Sudhin Kumar in January, 1965.*

In line with this attitude they criticised the United Front tactics of the socialists and the communists. The class-collaborationist tactic of the United Front was a colossal betrayal of the Indian masses. It derived its strength from the tactics of the People's Front in the West, which Tagore regarded as a Front against the people in as much as it was based upon the 'element' theory of the bourgeoisie.¹ Moreover, what Lenin had emphasized was the agitational and organizational unity of the workers.

In his crusade against Gandhism, he adopted the same line of criticism as that given by many other Leftist leaders of the period.² According to him Gandhi was not at all a revolutionary figure but "the greatest reactionary force in the world today". Satyagraha was in service of capitalism. He was a bourgeoisie through and through, and not a champion of the rights of the have-nots, as he himself used to proclaim from time to time. Gandhism and Communism were incompatible. The social roots of pacifism, of non-violence lay in the fact that the bourgeoisie, in the process of dissolution, was afraid of revolutionary forces and had therefore, adopted pacifism as a weapon to fight and bewilder the masses. That is why the bourgeoisie all over the world had recognised Gandhi as a prophet. According to Tagore, Gandhi could not even be recognised as a man of genuine non-violence, because he championed capitalism and defended the existence of classes and of castes, which were based upon violence. He also criticised Gandhi for his "socially reactionary" outlook in adopting a hostile attitude to Western civilisation. Tagore maintained that non-violence could only be justified on tactical grounds and, therefore, Gandhi's role in popularising that weapon during the days of the non-cooperation was undoubtedly great. But it had outlived its utility and it should not be defended as being of any "intrinsic" worth to the

1. Tagore : *People's Front or Front against the People*.

2. S. N. Tagore : *With Romain Rolland on Gandhism. It is an interesting work consisting of discussions with the French thinker on Gandhism; also Tagore : Satyagraha or service of capitalism ?*

national movement; since it was impossible to gain independence through Gandhi's methods.

Tagore thought that the C.S.P. came into existence as a result of the liaison between the Indian bourgeoisie and the Indian petty-bourgeoisie to hold the masses. It sided with Gandhism everytime when the decisive moment came. It had betrayed the Left-wing.¹ If it wanted to be true to its professions, the C.S.P. should be raised to the status of an independent political party having fundamental difference with the Congress. Congress and socialism were mutually antagonistic. True, Socialism could not be established without the defeat of imperialism but without a revolution freedom was unthinkable.²

It is in connection with the elaboration of his ideas on the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution that we get not only Tagore's criticism of Congress Socialism, "Congress" Communism as Tagore called it—and Royism, but also a knowledge of the ways he wanted to apply Marxism-Leninism in the impending revolution in India.³ Congress Socialism of the C.S.P. and Congress Communism of the Communist Party of India, according to him, were nothing but petty-bourgeois perversions of Marxism-Leninism. He criticised them both for according a revolutionary role to the bourgeoisie in the national movement and for holding the un-Marxian view that the leadership of this movement should be petty-bourgeois. He, therefore, ridiculed them for adopting United Front tactics with the bourgeoisie of the National Congress, for there could be no "bloc" between the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary masses.⁴ They want-

1. S. N. Tagore : *Congress Socialism ?*

2. *Ibid.*

3. S. N. Tagore : *Bourgeois Democratic Revolution and India.*

4. In the interview mentioned above Sudhin Kumar admitted that their attitude to the C.S.P. was marked by certain sectarianism, though on a further query as to whether the same was true of their attitude to the C.P.I. he remained silent. He, however, maintained that the Congress Socialists were socialists only in name and carried Congress propaganda among the masses.

ed the proletariat to be content with just playing the role of a political pressure-apparatus on the bourgeoisie. United Front was a betrayal of the proletariat.¹

Revolution, held Tagore, was the only mechanism which could bring about fundamental social and political transformations in a class-society, but the motives and the forces of revolution varied in different historical epochs. In determining the forces of revolution in India it was essential to remember that it was not only an epoch of imperialism but also one of socialist revolution. The presence of imperialism in India was responsible for a new alignment of class-forces. Firstly, the native bourgeoisie was dependent upon the imperialistic bourgeoisie; secondly, under imperialistic domination land was not exploited under a strictly feudal form of exploitation, capitalism had penetrated in the villages and the bourgeoisie had a stake in the land; thirdly, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie were closely related in India; and fourthly, the epoch of imperialism was the epoch not of the rise of capitalism but the epoch of capitalism's sunset and therefore, the bourgeoisie was not interested in the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution. Far from being a revolutionary class, it could not even be a force in this revolution. The task of carrying this revolution fell on the shoulders of the proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry, but its leadership would be in the hands of the proletariat, which was the only consistently revolutionary class. Tagore, therefore, vigorously criticised Roy for holding that the leadership of the proletariat in the anti-imperialist struggle was a dogma. On the basis of his analysis of the class-forces in India Tagore showed that it was not a dogma but a scientific truth that the proletariat should lead the anti-Imperialist Revolution in the colonial countries.²

This consideration was further strengthened, if it were realised that it was an epoch also of the Socialist Revolu-

1. S. N. Tagore : *United Front or Betrayal*.

2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 44.

tion and that, therefore, the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution could not be an end in itself. The aim of the proletariat and its party could only be a Socialist Revolution and it was only in the process of carrying out this Revolution that the unfinished task of the bourgeois revolution would be taken up and completed. "The bourgeois revolution will be a link in the chain of socialist revolution, which will accomplish the postponed democratic task of the bourgeois revolution."¹ It was this passing over of the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution into a Socialist Revolution which was the characteristic feature of the Democratic Revolution in the imperialistic era, and it was this which had been deplorably overlooked by the Royists and the Congress Socialists. From this reasoning Tagore also argued that the slogan of a Constituent Assembly, unless supplemented by a demand for a revolutionary Provincial Government, was meaningless and worthless. It was this revolutionary Government which, as in Russia, could convene a C.A. A C.A., convened by imperialism, could never be genuine. Roy, therefore, was wrong when he thought either that the National Congress itself, under certain circumstances and going through certain process of transformation, could assume the function of a C.A. or that the C.A. could be an instrument for the capture of power. A multi-class organization like the Congress could never be a party of the people.

It was often argued that the party of the proletariat in India could not assume such a task because the working class was small and not fully conscious of its role; and that India was a backward country with an economy that was partly capitalist and partly feudal. Tagore's reply was that the Russian proletariat was no larger a class at the time of the Revolution than it was in India. Moreover, at that time the existence of the Soviet State had to be taken into consideration. Therefore, the colonial revolution that he had in mind would coincide with the

revolt of the proletariat all over the world and India could skip over the bourgeois-democratic stage and pass directly towards a socialist revolution with the help of the U.S.S.R.; because industrialisation without capitalisation would be then possible. Here one can get a glimpse of Trotsky's ideas of a permanent revolution.

But such a view of revolution by no means implied that the party of the proletariat should put the maximum programme of socialism before the masses during the phase of democratic revolution. For that purpose a minimum programme was required. The advancement of a minimum programme required in turn that it must be advanced under the banner of a Communist Party. The Revolutionary Communists believed in a violent overthrow of the British rule under the leadership of a political party of the working class, which would draw in the workers, peasants and the urban middle class into an anti-imperialist mass movement. They emphasized dictatorship of the proletariat. The central slogan of revolution should be (a) the establishment of a Provisional Revolutionary Government, and (b) the Mazdoor-Kisan Panchayat Raj, that is the Democratic Republic of Workers and Peasants. Tagore's Communist League was designed to be a nucleus of such a Party. It functioned as such till 1939 when, after the outbreak of the War, Tagore was imprisoned along with many other Left elements.

The revolutionary communists supported Bose at Tripuri and this support continued till Bose struggled for Indian freedom from the Indian soil. But later they were opposed to his collaboration with Fascism.

The League of Radical Congressmen

The League of Radical Congressmen founded by M. N. Roy was an organizational expression of the ideas that Roy was propounding at the time. The ideal of national and social emancipation realizable through the instrumentality of a radicalised, democratised and activated National Congress, was the goal Roy emphasized. Already in 1933-34

his followers had formed the Independence of India League which fructified into the League of Radical Congressmen in 1937-38, established with a view to carrying forward the work of activising and democratising the Congress. It was a realization on the part of Roy that a sharp break with the Gandhian mode of thought and methods of struggle, which Roy regarded as a precondition for a successful national revolution, required an organised effort by radical Congressmen. It was also an expression of the growing disillusionment of Roy with Nehru in whom Roy had placed considerable faith as a left leader of great charm and potentiality. It also marked the beginning of the process of heart-searching in respect of Marxism and Communism which soon led him beyond them to Radical Humanism. Simultaneously with his critique of Gandhism and orthodox nationalism, already from 1936 onwards Roy started taking a critical look at Marxism. He started saying that the last word was not said by Marx a century ago; that Marxism was not a body of doctrines but a system or method of studying social facts and phenomena.¹ Philosophically, while still clinging to general creed of Materialism, he renamed it as the philosophy of Physical Realism.² But, by far, the new organization was a measure of the fact that Roy was too much of an individualist, thirsting for leadership and power. He could not be circumscribed by any organization, and thus formed his own group.³

CONCLUSION :

During 1935-39 India witnessed a United Front of all left elements, of a type witnessed neither before nor ever after. The Front gained considerable influence which was most strikingly demonstrated with the election of leftist Subhas Chandra Bose as the Congress President. But the different

1. Roy : *Fragments of a Prisoner's Diary*, Vol. III, p. 207.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

3. Both Narain and Narendra Deva refer to this aspect of Roy's personality.

Left groups differed on certain fundamentals : they were not under a united leadership and were mutually suspicious of each other. It happened, therefore, that the same Tripuri Congress which showed its pinnacle of strength, also marked the beginning of its disunity.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Left during the World War Two

The formal declaration of the World War II in September, 1939, brought an additional crisis to the Indian political scene. At the outset of the war, the atmosphere was already surcharged with considerable tension arising from the continuing stalemate between the Congress and the Government over the question of the Federation, and arising also from the tense relationship between the Right and the Left inside the Congress. At the same time there was the conflict existing inside the Left itself which further complicated the situation. What, in absence of war, would have been the possible lines of development in respect of each of these crises it is impossible to say with any amount of certainty. One can only surmise. It is reasonable to suppose that had not war intervened a suitable compromise would have been arrived at between the Congress and the Government over the Federation issue. The trend of thinking of the Right leadership in the Congress was in that direction, and though the Left, despite dissension among itself, was still uncompromisingly opposed to the Federation, yet, as we saw in the last chapter, by the middle of 1939, the Right had, by various measures, tightened its grip over the organizational machinery of the Congress. While after four years of efforts the Left was able to control well over one-third of votes in the A.I.C.C., yet it could not prevent any decision from being taken. The outbreak of the war, however, gave no opportunity for choice; on the contrary it brought in its wake fresh issues. The immediate issues that called for urgent consideration were the attitude to be adopted towards the War and the courses of action that necessarily followed from it. The different Left groups reacted variously and these we shall examine first, beginning with the attitude of the

National Congress up to June, 1941, against whose background the Left mostly formulated its attitudes.

*The National Congress and the War (September 1939-June 1941)*¹

Immediately upon the outbreak of the War, India became a belligerent country, and the fact that this had been done without even consulting the Central Legislature caused resentment in India. The Congress Working Committee, having considered the situation created by the War, issued a statement on September 14, 1939, in which it regretted the fact that India had been dragged into War. It declared that the War as was being conducted was an imperialist war and was meant to consolidate imperialism in India and elsewhere; and that it would continue to be so unless the British Government declared its war-aims. It, therefore, asked the Government "to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that it envisaged; in particular, how these aims are going to apply to India and to be given effect to in the present."² It further observed that the Indian people must have the right of national self-determination by framing their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly. The Committee declared itself in support of war-efforts if the Government came out in favour of the establishment of a free democratic state in India. In contrast to the views of his colleagues in the Working Committee, Mahatma Gandhi was in favour of an unconditional support, provided it was on strictly non-violent lines. The reply of the Viceroy to this statement being unsatisfactory, the Congress Ministries in the Provinces resigned in November, 1939. The Congress leaders, however, made it clear that they were not out to bargain with Britain in her hour of distress. In an article in Hari-

1. We have included this because it was against the background of the Congress' attitude to War that the other Left groups developed their policy. We can, however, only summarise the Congress stand.
2. *Indian Annual Register, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 230-31.*
P. Sitaramayya: *History of the National Congress*, p. 265.

jan of January 20, 1940, Gandhi wrote : "I am not spoiling for a fight. I am trying to avoid it. Whatever may be true of the members of the Working Committee, I wholly endorse Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose's charge that I am eager to have a compromise with Britain if it can be had with honour. Indeed Satyagraha demands it."¹ Events were moving fast and there was no assuring reply from the Government. In March, 1940 the Ramgarh session of the Congress took the view that "the recent pronouncements made on behalf of the British Government in regard to India demonstrate that Great Britain is carrying on the War fundamentally for imperialist ends Under these circumstances it is clear that the Congress can't in any way, directly or indirectly, be a party to the War." It declared that nothing short of complete independence would be accepted by the people of India, and demanded a C. A. to frame a constitution. It asked the Congress Committees to convert themselves into Satyagraha Committees and to prepare for Civil Disobedience.

But these decisions were not by themselves decisions to start a Satyagraha. Indeed, the Congress left the door open for negotiation and compromise. It gave rebuff to its own Left-wing for advocating immediate struggle and declared that the country was not prepared for a struggle. Speaking on the Resolution at Ramgarh, Patel observed : "I see people are ready for disobedience, but not for Civil Disobedience."² Speaking on the same occasion Gandhi said : "I have accepted the need for a fight but I shall exercise restraint. If I am a General, then just as a general wants to prepare for a fight before he gives orders to his soldiers, I shall do the same. I don't find anything to suggest that we are ready for a fight immediately."³ The Resolution was as much a concession to the Left as a pointer to the Government as to what the Congress might

1. *Harijan*. *Ibid*.

2. *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, p. 261.

3. *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, p. 261.

be compelled to do under the pressure of the growing demands of the Left for immediate action.

The Congress was also taking great care to see that if ever a movement were to be launched it must be strictly non-violent. For this purpose it had added amendments to the Independence Day Pledge which was to be taken on January 26, 1940. Among others it mentioned the following : "We recognise that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence"; "Non-violent action in general and preparation for non-violent action in particular require successful working of the constructive programme of khadi and removal of untouchability"; "Charkha and Khadi are integral part of our constructive programme for the resuscitation of the seven hundred thousand villages of India and for removal of grinding poverty of the masses." As we shall see later on, this new pledge drew sharp condemnations from some Left groups which were insisting upon immediate mass action. But Gandhi was adamant on this. Writing in the *Harijan* on January 27, 1940, he wrote : "It has been suggested to me that as soon as I declare Civil Disobedience, I shall find a staggering response. The whole Labour world and Kisans (peasants) in many parts of India will declare a simultaneous strike. If that happened I shall be most embarrassed and all my plans shall be upset.." He was more specific : "I hold that the coming into power of the proletariat through violence is bound to fail in the end. What is gained by violence must be lost before superior violence."¹

In the summer of 1940, following the collapse of France and the deepening crisis of War, the Congress Working Committee, at its Delhi meeting, made a new offer of co-operation, conditional upon the recognition of independence and the establishment of a Provisional Government. The new offer was ratified by the A.I.C.C. at Poona in July, 1940. This was done in spite of the

1. *Opt. Cit., Vol. I, Chronicle of events.*

opposition from Gandhi who was opposed to any offer of armed co-operation. To this the Viceroy made the now famous "August offer" on August 8, 1940. The Congress was not satisfied with the offer and in protest it started individual Civil Disobedience under the leadership of Gandhi in October, 1940, with Vinoba Bhave, who was later to shoot into prominence, as the first Satyagrahi. Many thousand Congressmen courted imprisonment in this manner; some of them being former Ministers and Chief Ministers of the Provinces. This movement died out by the middle of 1941 without ever assuming serious proportion. Indeed, Gandhi had never intended that it should be more than a "moral protest".

The Left and the War (1939-41)

The attitude of the Left towards War has always been a knotty problem. Differences among the Socialists on this subject were revealed as early as the Stuttgart Conference (1907), and the Copenhagen Conference (1910) of the Second International, but despite the division of opinion it was generally believed that the maintenance of the international solidarity of the working class should be the factor that would determine any attitude that the working class was required to adopt. In fact, the formulation of the International Congresses was that the Socialists should make utmost efforts to prevent imperialist War. If War, nevertheless, broke out, the crisis should be utilised for a proletarian revolution. This belief proved to be unfounded when the majority of the Socialists, with the exception of the Bolsheviks in Russia, in the West European countries supported their respective governments in the First World War. After close of the War, when the International Working Class Movement became divided into two broad sections, the Socialist and the Communist, two divergent attitudes to War began to be advocated. It was becoming apparent that the Socialist section was placing national considerations first, and that in future the various Socialist Parties of the West would judge War on national rather

than on international class considerations. The Communist section adhered to the international standpoint but two considerations entered into its characterisation of War. The first was the dictum prescribed by Lenin on the basis of the experiences of the Russian Revolution, to "transform the imperialist War into a civil war." According to Lenin War no longer remained the exclusive concern of the bourgeoisie. It was a conflict towards which the working class should not adopt a mere negative attitude, but, on the contrary, it should be treated as part of a technique of revolution. The defeat of the native bourgeoisie in an imperialist War was seen as a condition for the success of a revolution. The second factor was the establishment of the first Socialist Soviet State in Russia. With the prospects of the proletarian revolution in the advanced industrial countries of Western Europe having died out, Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution was gradually discarded and the motto of "Socialism in one country" came to be adopted. This was no final discarding of the faith in the World Proletarian Revolution; it was a realization of the fact that this revolution could best be promoted by strengthening the base of that revolution, that is, Soviet Russia. Defence of the Fatherland of the Proletariat, therefore, became the creed of the Communists all over the world. Theoretically speaking, the combining together of these two factors did not present much difficulty, but the fact remained that there might arise a situation in which the Soviet Union would be fighting on the side of one imperialist power against another. What was to be the attitude of the Communist Party of that imperialist country whose ally Russia was? Was it to promote the interests of the revolution or the interests of the Soviet Union? Did the two precepts contradict each other? Could they be reconciled? The testing point did not come until the outbreak of the World War II.

The situation was further complicated by the rise of Fascism with its anti-Bolshevik crusade. The Communists all over the world characterised Fascism as the highest and

the deadliest form of moribund capitalism, and anti-Fascism became one of the planks of the Soviet foreign policy. The Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, followed immediately by the outbreak of War, no doubt, produced a perplexing situation for the Communists. The Soviet Union, for whatever reasons, had formed a pact with its avowed enemy and, at the same time, a war was being waged against this enemy by other imperialist powers. The dilemma was well-described in a leader of the Labour Monthly, October 1, 1939. After quoting profusely from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin on Sovietism and War, it averred : "The present War, in which the characterisation of imperial conflict for the redivision of the world appears intermingled with other factors, with questions of national liberation and with the question of the working class and democratic struggle against Fascism, is a tangled knot which requires the most careful unravelling. This situation, which places different tasks according to their conditions before the different sections of the international working class movement in pursuit of their common aim and which will require correspondingly different tactics at successive stages of development according to the sharp changes in the alignment of forces which may be expected, demands most sober judgment in order to determine our line We are in a new type of situation which will demand every capacity of the leadership of the working class movement."

We have analysed these factors because in the different stands taken by the different Left-groups in India, at one stage or another, some or all of these factors did enter into their calculations. On the basis of the attitudes taken towards the War up to June, 1941, the Left-groups in India can be divided into two broad sections : those who declared it to be an imperialist war and, therefore, variously advocated resistance to it; and those who did not regard the War as an imperialist one and advocated support to it. Among the first were : the Forward Bloc, the Communists, the Congress Socialists and the various splinter left-groups that

were formed during this period. The Roy Group was the solitary advocate of the second viewpoint.

The Forward Bloc : We have had glimpses of the Forward Bloc in the last chapter. Immediately after the outbreak of the War, the Bloc, under Bose's leadership, came forward with the slogan that it was an imperialist war. In consonance with his stand since Haripura Bose held that a golden opportunity had come before the nationalist movement in India, and that an immediate struggle should be started. History would not forgive them if they did not utilise this opportunity. He criticised the Right leadership of the Congress for its compromising and vacillating outlook and for inaction. For sometime in September, 1939, Bose gave the impression that he was not averse to a negotiated settlement with the British, if it could be had with honour,¹ but from October-November onwards he reverted to his oft-repeated theme that freedom could not be had through compromise, and that the National Congress should pose the issue of National Demand before the Government and prepare for struggle on that basis. He was sure that the Government would never accede to their demands. In fact the L.C.C. organised an anti-compromise conference at Nagpur in October, 1939 on the eve of the meeting of the Working Committee at Wardha. This became more evident from the November, 1939 meeting of the Working Committee of the Forward Bloc. Bose felt that the Congress resolutions were brave in words but impotent in action. The Congress, under its dominant Gandhian leadership, did not want a struggle. He declared that this leadership must be replaced. As an extreme alternative he even suggested the formation of a Leftist Congress. While being one with some other left-elements that a unified struggle under the banner of the Congress as a whole should be launched, he also felt that if necessary a struggle should be launched even without the whole Congress. On the plea of unpreparedness on the part of the people, and

1. S. Bose : *Lead from Wardha in Forward Bloc, Sept. 9, 1939.*

prevalence of the spirit of violence and communalism, the Congress, he held, went on postponing the very idea of a struggle, let alone preparations for it.¹ To him the activity of the Congress Right were directed more against the Left than against imperialism.² In this vein Bose sometimes gave the impression that for the left, revolutionary nationalists, this Right leadership was more of an enemy than imperialism. He criticised the Congress Socialists and Communists for timidity and for surrendering to the Right. He criticised Nehru in the same vein. A further difference between Bose on the one hand and these leftists was over the question of a Constituent Assembly which Bose felt could be convened only after capture of power. A C. A. convened by the British would be only a glorified All-Parties Conference. Moreover, it was a cover for abandoning the demand for Swaraj. The Congress Socialists and the Communists, on the contrary, held that Bose's politics might split the Congress, so indispensable for the impending national struggle. The Communists also argued that though Bose criticised the Right leadership of the Congress for inaction but he himself did nothing for a forward move. As we shall later see the Communists were advocating the idea 'through local struggles to a national struggle,' they argued that the leftists were the strongest in Bengal and had a dominant voice in the Provincial Congress. Thus they could have started struggles for civil liberties and for other immediate demands of the masses and would thus have precipitated a national struggle by even forcing the whole Congress into it by sheer logic of circumstances.³ It may be noted that the Bengal P.C.C. launched such a struggle on 26th January, 1926, though it lacked good preparations and organizations.

Be that it may, the Congress Socialists withdrew from the Left Consolidation Committee in October, 1939. A rupture between the Forward Bloc and the Communists

1. S. Bose : *Crossroads*, p. 114.
2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 222.
3. S. R. Goel : *Netajee and the C.P.I.*

in the L.C.C. took place in December, 1939. By the time the Communists left they had also evolved an ideological justification that the Bloc was a 'counter-revolutionary' organization of the disgruntled petty-bourgeoisie.¹ Bose, on the contrary, charged the Communists of insincerity, and of using the Forward Bloc for their own purposes.²

Undismayed, Bose continued his line of action. He formed an "Anti-Compromise Committee" and side by side with the annual session of the National Congress in March, 1940 at Ramgarh, he held an "Anti-Compromise Conference" which was largely attended, and in this respect even rivalled the gathering at the Congress session. A Kisan rally was also organised under the leadership of the veteran Bihar Kisan Sabha leader, Swami Sahjanand. But the Congress Socialists and the Communists dissociated themselves from the Conference.

From its platform Bose declared that the Bloc stood for a bold "uncompromising fight with imperialism", and inaugurated what he called a national struggle. He deprecated the emphasis on the spinning wheel, constructive work etc. in the new Independence Day pledge. Bose felt that this, together with the pledge on discipline was designed to convert the Congress into a truly Rightist Congress. The Conference appointed an All-India Council of Action for "furthering the struggle." After this posture of the Bloc was known the Government arrested many prominent leaders of the Bloc all over the country. Amidst these troublesome days the Bloc held its second all-India conference in June, 1940 at Nagpur. It reiterated its stand more categorically. Immediately after that Bose was interned in his house in Calcutta, early in July, 1940. In January, 1941 Bose escaped and went to Germany where he formed Azad Hindustan. In 1943 he later went to Japan, established a provisional Government of Azad Hindustan with headquarters at Singapore and raised the Indian National Army out of the Indian prisoners in Japanese hands. This Army fought

1. S. Bose : *Indian Struggle, 1935-42*, p. 89.

2. *Ibid.*

against the Allies on the Assam-Burma front. Towards the end of the War he was reported to be killed in an air-crash. During his absence in India the Blocists continued to look to him for inspiration, and, as we shall see, they played a prominent part in the August, 1942 Movement. Most of them were arrested and remained in prison throughout the War. It must be noted that during this period, the Bloc played only an anti-imperialist role. The Bloc was never a homogeneous body ideologically and it had no consciously formulated ideology. Most of its members consisted of Radical Nationalists rather than Socialists. As already mentioned, Bose himself was not a doctrinaire Socialist and held that during nationalist phase of struggle a leftist was one who waged an uncompromising fight with imperialism. This, together with the opposition to the Right-wing outlook, constituted the cementing line of the Blocists during the period.

The Communists : The same difficulty, that was initially faced by the British Communist Party in immediately characterising the War as an imperialist one, was also faced by the Indian Communists. But they were in a more favourable situation, for during the period of the Russo-German pact at least, they could adopt an anti-imperialistic and anti-British view without being in contradiction to Russia's foreign policy. After some hesitation, therefore, they characterised the War as an imperialist war and vehemently criticised the British Government for dragging India into War. This was in full accord with the prevailing sentiments of the national movement in India. Like some other Left-groups, they became champions of the immediate launching of a nationwide mass movement for freedom. The still illegal Communist Party inaugurated its programme of resistance to War by calling a one-day political protest strike of 90,000 Bombay textile workers on October 2, 1939. Thus started a process which continued intermittently all through 1940. Protest against War and against dragging India into War were a recurrent feature of these strikes. Prominent among these were : The Bombay Tex-

tile Workers' Strike in March, 1940, the sugar workers of Bihar, the scavengers in Calcutta, coal miners in Jharia etc. Occasionally they were supported by students, who were increasingly coming to the scene. Simultaneously there was intensification of the peasant movement through the Kisan Sabha which had by then become a powerful organization. They came out with the slogan 'na ek pai, na ek bhai' (not a pie, not a brother). Many of these strikes were, no doubt, due to economic causes and were forced by the rising prices and consequent demands for higher pay, dearness allowance, etc., but almost on each occasion the Communists inculcated among the workers the political issues of the solidarity of the Indian working-class with the international working-class and the people of the world. They criticised the National Congress for not supporting these strikes.

The November, 1939 resolution of the Political Committee of the C.P.I. held that War had been possible due to the compromising, appeasing policy of British imperialism which wanted War to be directed against the Soviet Union. It declared the War to be the second Imperialist War. It resolved to utilise the war-crisis in the interests of national freedom, through mass anti-imperialist struggles. Capitalism was in a crisis. The revolutionary forces of peace, democracy and socialism were immeasurably stronger and the defeat of imperialism and Fascism was on the agenda. It went on : 'Revolutionary utilisation of the War crisis for the achievement of National Freedom—this is the central task before the national forces in the New Period The War crisis brings out in the sharpest manner and intensifies a thousandfold the conflict between the British Government and the Indian people. Opposition to War measures grows. Struggle breaks out.

" Thus opens up the perspective of transformation of imperialist War into a war of national liberation. This perspective must be brought before the entire national movement Capture of power is an immediately realisable goal—a goal for which preparations must be

begun in right earnest.”¹ It warned that the imperialist strategy was to nip in the bud the revolutionary movement by taking drastic measures against the revolutionary core of the national movement, that is, the Socialists, Communists and Radical Congressmen. It also aimed at encouraging the forces of disruption.

The resolution held that the dominant leadership of the Congress did not want to use the weapon of mass struggles, it only wanted to utilise the War crisis for striking a hard bargain with Imperialism without struggle.

They invariably criticised the Congress leadership for vacillation and compromise, for offering conditional support to War and for not preparing for an immediate mass struggle. They felt that the strategy of stalemate would mean that the revolutionary vanguard would be decimated in isolation through imperialist repression. It was said that Gandhism had entered into its decadent phase and was acting as a fetter on the national struggle. The Party issued a manifesto on the occasion of the Independence Day in January, 1940, which declared that undreamed of possibilities had opened out for fulfilling the Independence Day pledge, and they urged Congressmen to grasp the real national and international significance of the revolutionary situation. With the outbreak of War a new era of revolution had begun, the masses were raising the Red Banner in every country, and Britain was no longer master of the situation. “If that opportunity is wasted, if today when all the conditions are favourable for a victorious advance, we falter and fail, we shall commit a crime against our national movement, a crime against humanity. History will never forgive that crime.”² It put forth the slogan of Democracy, Freedom and Peace, demanded a Peoples’ Democratic Republic with a Peoples’ Army. It also demanded a Constituent Assembly and gave full support to

1. P. C. Joshi : *Communist Reply*, p. 36.
2. *World News & Views*, March 16, 1940. The Manifesto was printed in full here.

the "National Demands" that had been passed by the Tripuri Session of the National Congress. But it held that the policy of the Congress from the period October, 1939 to March, 1940 was a zigzag policy of inaction and waiting. Even the Ramgarh Congress resolution was only a threat of struggle.

But while criticising the leadership of the Congress, they avoided any criticism of the Congress itself. This was in sharp contrast to the Civil Disobedience days of 1930-33 when the Congress itself was characterised as a bourgeois organization. Now not only the role of the Congress in the national movement was recognised but "the absolute necessity of national unity" was also emphasized.¹ This concern for maintaining the unity of the National Congress partly accounts for some of the hesitating stands taken by the Communists ever since the Tripuri Congress. It also explains in part their refusal ultimately to back Bose's Forward Bloc. P. C. Joshi, the then Secretary of the Party, made this clear in a statement on the Anti-Compromise Committee of Bose : " the struggle to be initiated by the proposed committee will be neither national nor a struggle. Nor will it be possible to lead the Congress on to the path of active mass struggle by these methods. It will disunite the Congress and thus weaken the only organization capable of conducting a truly national campaign."² It is clear, therefore, that they disapproved of Bose's methods and tactics of splitting the Congress and its leadership. Thus while they were strongly opposed to the policy of the Congress leadership, they believed that the lessons they had derived from their own bitter experiences of the early thirties indicated that the best way to realize this aim was not by shouting provocative slogans, or by openly coming before the rank and file for the displacement of that leadership. To do so would amount to little more than

1. B. Asche, *Nehru and the Question of Civil Disobedience in India*, in *World News and Views*, June 8, 1940.
2. *Ibid.*

reducing the battle to the level of a fight between personalities, and which would only play into the hands of the Right, who still held sway over the masses. The appropriate tactic, therefore, was to start the fight first on the ideological plane, to show to the masses that the time was opportune for starting a struggle, to put before them a clear picture of the national and international forces, and a clear picture of what should be done and how it should be done. It was only then that it would be possible to demonstrate and prove that the leadership was hesitant and vacillating and eager for a compromise, and that is why it was not launching a struggle. It was the policy of "United Front from below", that is unity with the rank and file against the leaders. The task of fighting the leadership was to be done from below and not from the top, as Bose's methods seemed to imply.¹ The Communists found a favourable atmosphere for pursuing this policy for there existed an unbounded public enthusiasm for an all out struggle. All the Left-groups and parties were prepared for such a step and even the Congress leaders were openly saying that a struggle was inevitable. The resolution of the Ramgarh Congress mentioned above explicitly said so.

But there were also other considerations in this policy which have to be carefully noted. The policy for the displacement of leadership, while desirable, was not to be pushed to the point where it would bring about a split in Congress; this was to be avoided at all costs.² That is why the Communists were asked not to break their organizational links with the Congress and that is why they accepted the new Independence Day pledge, which even the Congress Socialists were unable to accept. Indeed the main emphasis of the Communists seemed to be to push the en-

1. *World News & Views*, No. 41, 1940. *The Real Struggle in India*. No. 30, 1940. *The Political Situation in India*, No. 26. *India must refuse all cooperation.*
2. An article appearing in May 1 issue of *World News and Views* entitled, *The Lessons of Ramgarh Congress expressed satisfaction that at Ramgarh Congress it had been possible to preserve the unity of the Congress.*

tire Congress into an immediate mass struggle. Even the fight against the leadership could be made an instrument of this policy, for it was conceivable that under the pressure of the rank and file the leadership could be compelled to launch a struggle. In a pamphlet entitled "The Congress Socialist Party and the War", dated March, 1940, the Communists maintained : "With the outbreak of War and with the consequent sharpening of all conflicts, conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, conflict between the landlords and the peasants, conflicts between the British Government and the Indian people—Gandhism has entered into its last and most reactionary phase. No longer is Gandhiji's leadership, in even a restricted sense, the unifier of the people's movement, no longer has it any progressive role whatsoever. Compromise on the issue of War is the biggest danger that faces the National movement and Gandhism today means the line of that compromise.

"This does not mean an organizational break from the Congress which is even today dominated by the Gandhists, but it does mean relentless struggle against and exposure of Gandhism as a political line, as a technique, and as an organizational principle; it does mean the sharpest opposition to Gandhian leadership; it does mean isolation of that leadership and determined effort to smash its influence."

The ideas involved in this policy could be better understood if it were also realized that this admission of the role of the Congress in the National Movement did not mean abandonment of the idea of the proletarian leadership of the movement. The idea was to force the Congress, with or without its leadership, to launch a struggle in the name of and under the prestige of a united Congress, and then to assume leadership of that struggle. This was amply made clear in a pamphlet called "The Proletariat Path" which held that the proletariat alone was capable of leading the struggle to a successful conclusion. The attack on the Gandhian leadership and Gandhian technique sprang out of an anxiety that the struggle should not follow a

circumscribed path but should be a mass movement unrestricted by the creed of non-violence. The lines of work were indicated in an article called "Non-violence or a Peoples' Army."¹ After the Ramgarh Congress the National Congress gave a call for organising local Defence Volunteers and Councils of Action and Satyagraha Committees. The Communists were asked to take hold of these and to organise on that basis Peoples' Defence Corps and thus to strengthen their grip over the local committees.

It is no wonder that they criticised the individual Satyagraha movement launched in October, 1940. It was variously described as a non-violent suicide, a blind alley and an anti-struggle and compromising policy. The *Communist* of November, 1940 wrote : "Human ingenuity could not have drawn up any better rules for sabotaging all struggle and for dashing the national movement to pieces. Every Congressman must be made to realize that this Satyagraha can only lead to our prostration before the enemy That we have a national leadership that can offer such a plan is the supreme tragedy of the situation."²

The successful carrying out of these tactics required a strong United Marxist Party. The Communists gave a slogan for such a Party. They urged the Congress Socialists to convert the Socialist Party into a mass party that could constitute a forum from which declared Marxists could be recruited for the United Marxist Party. Differences with the Congress Socialists had arisen on this point since the Lahore Conference of the C.S.P. and among other things led to a rupture between the two parties which culminated in 1940, at the time of the Ramgarh Congress, when the Congress Socialist Party expelled all Communists from the Party.³ The Communists were insisting that only the

1. B. Asche · *Non-violence or a Peoples' Army in World News and Views*, July 6, 1940.
2. P. C. Joshi : *Communist Reply to Congress Working Committee charges*, p. 6.
3. J. P. Narain, *Socialist Unity and the C.S.P.*

working class could lead the National Movement but the Congress Socialists had now come to the position that the leadership could only be under petty-bourgeois intellectuals. The insistence of the Communists on a United Marxist Party was also due to their belief that the national movement should not stop with the national revolution but should pass on to a socialist revolution. The Socialists, however, separated these two objectives in point of time and placed immediate emphasis on the achievement of national freedom and maintained that the question of Socialism could arise only in a free India.¹

This militant anti-war attitude of the Communists led to their wholesale arrests early in 1940 and most of them remained in prison till 1942, when after Hitler's attack on Russia, they were gradually released. In the interval the Party almost ceased to function. Whatever activity there was, was directed from the underground. But though this underground Party centre worked from October, 1939 onwards but in the provinces the underground centres were not effective. The imperialist repression proved too strong for them.

The Congress Socialists : The Congress Socialists from the very beginning took the attitude that the War was an imperialistic War and that the National Congress should take full advantage of the opportunity that presented itself to strike out for independence. In this they were purely motivated by nationalistic reasons. Ever since the formation of their party they had taken an attitude of war-resistance. The platform of action adopted by the first Bombay Conference of the Party in 1934 laid down what the policy of the Socialists would be : "Active opposition to all imperialist wars and the utilization of such and other crises for the intensification of the national struggle."² Their influence in the National Congress had led that body at its Lucknow Congress to adopt anti-war resolutions, which had been reaffirmed at successive annual sessions of the Congress.

1. See the chapter, *The Socialists and War*.
2. *Report of the First Bombay Conference*.

When, therefore, the National Congress came out in favour of conditional support, the Socialists criticised the Congress for abandoning the path laid down by those resolutions. They also argued that it was against national self-respect to be dragged in War without consent. They advocated opposition to the War efforts and gave the slogan 'Na ek pai, na ek bhai' (neither a pie, nor a brother).

The attitude of the Party to the War was first defined by the September 6, 1939 meeting of National Executive of the Party. It was later elaborated by the other meetings of the Executive as well as in the War circulars by the General Secretary, two of which appeared between September to December, 1939.¹ In these the Party expressed unconditional opposition to the War and to the British Government. It favoured immediate mass struggle, without the formality of declaration of War aims by the Government and without negotiations and bargaining. It brought an amendment to this effect at the Wardha meeting of the A.I.C.C., which, however, was rejected. The National Executive formulated the following tasks : (a) To carry on a vigorous anti-war propaganda, including demonstrations and political strike. (b) To activise Congress Committees for anti-war work, (c) to push the enrolment of volunteers. When the Congress Ministries resigned in October, 1939, the Congress Socialists welcomed it and urged preparations for a struggle.²

A conference of the A.I.C.S.P. met at Poona in July, 1940 at the same time as the Poona meeting of the A.I.C.C., and while the latter took a decision to offer conditional support to War, the Socialists opposed this resolution and advocated a policy of immediate and unconditional resistance to it. According to them the Indian people should not rest satisfied either with any declarations that Britain might make regarding India or the Provisional Government. A resolution of the Conference said : "Despite any declarations that Britain would make regarding India, Britain

1. C.S.P. : *War Circulars*, 1 & 2 of 1939.

2. *Ibid.*

would remain an imperialist power and the War an imperialist War.”¹ Presiding over the Bihar Socialist Conference in the same month, Meherally said : “So long as all power is not transferred to the Indian people, all talk of a national government at the Centre is no good.”² Behind the attitude of the Congress Socialists was the conviction, which had formed the basic plank of the Party ever since its inception, that no freedom could be had by negotiations and compromise. They had always urged that independence could be secured by the path of direct struggle, and to them never was a time more opportune than that provided by the War crisis.

The Congress Socialists agitated for preparations for Satyagraha. Previous to the Ramgarh Congress they had criticised the Congress for not deciding in favour of a struggle, but after that Congress they took their stand on the resolution of the Congress which admitted that a struggle was inevitable. At the Poona meeting of the A.I.C.C. they had taken the view that the decision of the Ramgarh Congress was fundamental and that to raise any questions of co-operation was to confuse that fundamental principle. After that decision the only course open was to act upon it in entirety, to transform Congress Committees into Satyagraha Committees, to enrol and train volunteers, to create an effective organization of National Guards throughout the country and to reorganise the Congress Committees so as to make them effective in emergency.³

Their criticism of the Congress was not made in any hostile spirit but rather in a spirit of co-operation and collaboration. They urged the unity both of the Congress and its leadership which, according to them, was the only guarantee of a successful national struggle. They, therefore, deprecated all ideas of any criticism of the Congress and its leadership, and castigated all those who talked in

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II, p. 332.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

3. *Report of Conference of A.I.C.S. Party, Poona, July, 1940, Indian Annual Register*, 1940.

terms of splits. Unity of the Congress meant the unity of its leadership and, since the Congress alone was capable of leading the national struggle, any crusade against the leaders meant not only crusade against the Congress itself but also sabotaging the national struggle. Their plan was to win the Congress for action in its entirety without any distinction of Right or Left.¹ They, therefore, deplored attacks on the Gandhian leadership. This was regarded by the other Left-groups as a surrender to Gandhi and Gandhism. To this the reply of the Congress Socialists was that it was no surrender to Gandhism but a realistic approach to the situation. "The line we have adopted", said Narendra Dev, "does not mean that we have accepted the Gandhian philosophy of life or that we have come to regard the Gandhian technique as adequate or effective. We have again and again pointed out the inadequacy and partial ineffectiveness of the Gandhian technique of struggle and have put forward programmes to supplement it."²

They also held that to raise issues of Socialism versus Gandhism in the existing circumstances was irrelevant. The task facing the country was that of preparing and launching a national struggle and this was not a Socialist but a Nationalist task to be carried out by Socialists, Gandhians and others.³ Socialism vrs. Gandhism was not the issue then. To the criticism that in that case the Congress Socialist Party became superfluous, no convincing reply was given. The fact was that the position that they now had taken not only implied preoccupation with national freedom but what was more, it meant throwing off some of the assumptions on which the Party was originally formed. The very starting point of the Party was that unless adequate organizational and programmatic transformations were brought about in the Congress, no national struggle would succeed; that the association of the masses of workers and peasants

1. N. Dev : *Socialism and National Revolution*, pp. 126-27, J. P. Narain : *Towards Struggle*, p. 135.
2. N. Dev : *Ibid.*, p. 183.
3. J. P. Narain : *Towards Struggle*, p. 137.

was a condition for the success of the movement, and that the national struggle must adopt new methods of struggle. In the six years of its existence the Party could record no appreciable change in any of these directions, and it openly accepted this fact. "But in spite of all our efforts", said Narain, "the official programme of the Congress is still Gandhijee's programme of 1920". And further: "The effective leadership of the Congress is in the hands of Gandhijee. It is obvious that if the Congress starts a struggle today it would be in accordance with the programme that Gandhijee lays down. We can influence that programme but can't determine it. The technique of the struggle would, therefore, naturally be the old Gandhian technique, whether any one likes it or not".¹ No struggle, Dev felt, would have a nationwide character unless Gandhijee associated himself with it.

After having arrived at this assessment of the situation, the Party leaders started questioning some of the fundamental assumptions of the Party. About the role of the Trade Union Congress, the Kisan Sabha etc., the Party leaders were now of the opinion that their role in the national movement would be "clearly of an auxiliary character", they had "potentiality for future" but none of them could "hope to fight imperialism with any degree of success."² One has only to compare this with some of the early resolutions of the Party as also the assertions of J. P. Narain in "Why Socialism" to find the obvious change of attitude.

However, having accepted that position, the plan of the Party was to make the best out of the existing Congress. The immediacy and inevitability of a revolution was what every Left-group, except the Roy group, was talking about and the Congress Socialists did not lag behind in this respect. They persistently urged the Congress to start a struggle. Here the tactics of the Socialists came very near

1. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 139.

that of the Communists. It seems that though they had accepted the inevitability of the Gandhian leadership and Gandhian technique of struggle, they did not regard them as commendable. They talked of supplementing the Gandhian technique once the struggle was started. They talked as if they believed that a new leadership and a new technique of struggle might emerge in the course of struggle. Narendra Dev observed : "A mass struggle always throws up new leaders of the masses. It is only by showing qualities of leadership, by leading the masses from victory to victory, that one can win their confidence and achieve a place in the national leadership." And further : "The new technique of struggle can also be tried in however limited a field. And if it proves effective and compares favourably with the old technique and impresses people, it becomes a powerful instrument for changing the leadership." But given this approach some of the old assumptions of the Party started entering through the back-door. Indeed the Congress Socialists seemed to have been caught up in a situation where while the heart was with Gandhi, the head was with Marx, and though Gandhism was gradually having the upper hand, the ghost of Marx refused to disappear.

This brings us to the question of the ideological approach of the C.S.P. during the period. Though never a homogeneous group ideologically, the dominant leadership of Party had for a long time been under the Marxists Narain and Dev. But with the outbreak of the War and the vision of an inevitable national struggle and of free India, the Nationalists were gaining the upper hand. Even the old Marxists were losing their former enthusiasm. Marxism had always been identified with the pronouncements and actions of the Soviet Union, but following the great Soviet purges, and witnessing new turns in the Soviet foreign policy, they were becoming sceptical of the Soviet Union. Their faith in Marxism was in consequence weakened but the anomalous nature of their position was that they refused to

shift their ground and continued to profess faith in Marxism. Hence the equivocations that we have noted.

Discarding faith in Marxism for all practical purposes, though still paying lip service to it, led to an estrangement of relationship between the Congress Socialists and the Communists. Still believing C.S.P. to be a "sister Marxist Socialist Party", the Communists urged the merger of the two parties and the creation of an independent United Marxist Socialist Party under a working-class leadership. The Socialists rejected this proposal, they were not prepared to disband the C.S.P. They, on the contrary, were thinking of developing their party along the lines of the Social Democratic Parties of the West. The differences between the C.S.P. and C.P.I. also arose over the allegation of the C.S.P. that the Communists were doing faction work inside the Party. At the time of their expulsion from the C.S.P., the Communists had gained complete control of the C.S.P. branches in Andhra, Tamilnad, Kerala etc., and while leaving the Party they took these branches intact into the Communist fold. This all but paralysed the C.S.P. and for some time the C.S.P. remained a party mostly of leaders without much following, having being taken over by the Communists.

During this early phase of War the Congress Socialists, like the Communists, Blocists and Kisan Sabhaites, suffered a lot for adopting an attitude of war-resistance. Many of its prominent leaders like Narain, Lohia, etc., were put in jail.

The Roy Group and War (1939-41) : As already mentioned, in 1939 M. N. Roy had reorganised his group as the League of Radical Congressmen. It was the only Left-group in India up to June, 1941 which maintained that the War was not an imperialist War and advocated an attitude of co-operation. Immediately after the outbreak of War the League adopted a lengthy thesis in which it maintained that the War was neither imperialist nor anti-Fascist. It was not an imperialist War because the participants were not all imperialist powers. It maintained that Germany was

not an imperialist power. Autarchy and self-containedness were the chief characteristics of Fascism. Though Nazi Germany sought territorial expansion, yet it was a make-believe. Export of finance capital and not territorial expansion was the predominant characteristic of 20th Century imperialism. U.S.A., for example, was the greatest imperialist power, yet its empire was not based on territorial expansion.¹ But Germany lacked finance capital. In fact, after the First World War she had been dependent financially upon the City of London and the Wall Street. Even in the new territories conquered she would depend on the finance capital provided from London and New York and, therefore, territorial expansion of Germany, provided it was eastwards, was not intrinsically in conflict with the interests of the capitalists of Great Britain and U.S.A. Fascism indeed was the foster child of capitalism and its avowed aim was the destruction of Bolshevism.²

It was equally a mistake to call the War a war between Democracy and Fascism or an anti-Fascist War, because imperialism could not be expected consciously to wage a war against its twin cousin Fascism. Moreover, Britain was not a real democracy. The War could be imperialist or anti-Fascist only if it were according to a premeditated plan, as for example, the First World War was. The existing War was not a war of design but of accident. The capitalists always expected that Hitler would attack the Soviet Union.³

The thesis maintained that the War was an internecine war in the camp of counter-revolution. The twentieth century was an age of revolution and the world was divided into two camps, that of the revolutionary forces and the counter-revolutionary forces. The War would almost inevitably lead to the strengthening of the forces of revolution all over the world, and successful revolutions were

1. *Radical Democratic Party : India and War*, pp. 8-11. It is a collection of the main resolutions of the Roy-group during War.
2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 14.
3. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 35.

bound to occur in a number of countries. It was this appraisal that should determine the attitudes of radicals towards War, because whether Great Britain liked or not, it would lead to the defeat of Fascism and consequent weakening of the forces of counter-revolution. Fascism anyway was deadlier than Imperialism. Moreover, Britain did stand for some pretences of Democracy.¹ The Indian people were called upon to take their rightful place in this international Civil War and win their freedom.

The League of Radical Congressmen of Roy thus advocated support for the War efforts except during the short period of the "phoney war" when it advocated a policy of neutralism but not of war-resistance. This group criticised the attitude that the National Congress adopted. According to Roy the Congress, instead of talking of the distant goal of independence, should have sought the basis of co-operation in War efforts. According to him the Congress was in a position to dictate terms but it refused to follow the only realistic policy possible. Under the exigencies of War Britain could do no more than make a declaration of independence. "Would that satisfy the Congress?" Roy asked. And what if even after making such a declaration under the pressure of circumstances, Britain refused to implement after the War?² In an article Ellen Roy, the wife of M. N. Roy, declared that freedom could not be had by begging. Roy was of opinion that the Congress Ministries should not have resigned. By remaining in office they would have strengthened the forces of Democracy and freedom by preserving civil liberties.³

M. N. Roy thought the Congress leadership had come under the influence of Fascism and all its decisions regarding War had germs of Fascism in it. To fight this tendency Roy contested the Presidentship of the Ramgarh Session of the National Congress (1940) but was badly defeated by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the official nominee. For the

1. *Cit.*, pp. 50-55.

2. *Opt. Cit.*, pp. 8-9.

3. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 11.

time being he advised his Radical Congressmen to remain inside the Congress but towards the end of the year he formed an independent Party—called the Radical Democratic Peoples Party.¹ We shall deal with this later in this chapter.

The Left and the War (June, 1941-1945) :

With Hitler's attack on Soviet Russia in June, 1941, began the second phase of the World War II. It also marked a new alignment of forces inside the nationalist movement in general and the leftist movement in particular in India. Sharp controversies arose regarding the characterisation of the new phase of war and the attitude to be adopted towards it. The National Congress sympathised with the new victims of aggression but refrained from pronouncing any judgment on the character of the War, the suspension of judgment having been necessitated not only due to the differences regarding the nature of the War among the top Congress leaders, but also because of the lack of agreement on the courses of action that might have to be adopted after that. The dilemma of the Congress politician was well presented by Nehru when he observed that looked at from the international alignment of forces there was no doubt that the progressive forces of the world were aligned with the group represented by Russia, China, America and Britain, but looked at from the Indian point of view this group also contained imperialist Britain which was still continuing its old hold on India.² It was this relationship with Britain, he maintained, which governed India's attitude towards the War. The correct view for an Indian to adopt was to regard the War neither as a People's War nor as an imperialist War. "It was a war ultimately for each country that was involved in it for survival."³ He regarded the People's War slogan as an absurdity in the Indian context. He expressed the sentiments of average Congressmen that

1. *Opt. Cit.*, pp. 150-200; *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. II.
2. *J. Nehru : Before and After Independence*, p. 204.
3. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 223.

the entry of either Japan or Germany into India would be resisted.

The Congress Socialist Party took the view that the War in the main continued to be an imperialist war. The former enthusiasm of the Socialist leaders for Soviet Russia was now considerably dampened and they were not willing to regard the War as a people's war merely on the ground that the Soviet was on the side of the Allies. According to Narendra Dev a War could be regarded as a people's war only if it were a war for national liberation conducted by a subject people or a war where the masses rose in revolt against the bourgeoisie and their national government, or a war which could lead to the destruction of both Capitalism and Fascism.¹ In a collective situation the nature of War could be determined only with reference to "the basic policies and objectives of the principal combatants", but the principal combatants of the War, Britain, U.S.A., Germany, Italy and Japan, were all imperialists and they were all fighting for their national interests. Even after the War, peace terms would be dictated by Britain and U.S.A. and not by Soviet Russia and, therefore, it was wrong to maintain that a New World Order based on freedom and equality would emerge after the War.² Indians must fight to gain freedom. P. Tricumdas, the General Secretary of the C.S.P., stated on December 6, 1941 that in the absence of grant of freedom to India the War must remain imperialist. The Socialist Party, therefore, not only advocated continuance of the policy of war-resistance but it also urged the Congress to launch a struggle. They criticised the Communists for adopting a People's War attitude.

The Communists at first did not recognise any change in the nature of the War. Thus a pamphlet called "Soviet-German War" published by the Polit-Bureau of the C.P.I. in July, 1941 maintained that the War continued to be an imperialist war and advocated the continuance of the old policy of resistance to War. It said : "The Communist

1. N. Dev, *Socialism and the National Revolution*, pp. 146-47.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

Party declares that the only way in which the Indian people can help in the just War which the Soviet is waging is by fighting all the more vigorously for their own emancipation from the imperialist yoke. Our attitude towards the British Government and its imperialist War aims remains what it was. We must continue, nay, intensify our struggle against both. There can be no change in our policy until a people's government which unequivocally renounces imperialist aims in this War as well as in India and in the Colonies, comes to power. We can render really effective aid to the Soviet Union only as a free people."¹ Even as late as October 30, 1941, one of the party letters maintained that "only in the measure the people gather the strength to assert themselves against imperialists and their rule, only in that measure will they be able to line up in the international people's front for winning the War against Fascism and for the Soviet people and the people of the world."² But this letter also marked the beginning of a new attitude to War.

It has to be noted that this view of the underground Communists was different from the thesis developed by the Party veterans in the Deoli detention camp. They had taken an internationalist stand and held that the character of War underwent a transformation with the entry of the Soviet Union into the War.

Meanwhile, the international Communists, particularly the Communists of Great Britain, had already adopted a People's War attitude. The Communist Party of Great Britain adopted a long resolution on India in October, 1941, wherein an endeavour was made to prove that the War had become a People's War.³ It recalled how the Indian Nationalist movement had all along taken an anti-Fascist attitude and had repeatedly passed anti-Fascist resolutions. The British-Soviet Alliance had at last been established and a world alliance of the peoples against Fascism was being built. Indian people could not and should not place them-

1. *The C.P.I. : Soviet-German War.*

2. Quoted by N. Dev, *Socialism and the National Revolution*, p. 153.

3. *World News and Views*, October 18, 1941.

selves outside of it. Lest that might not be sufficient to convert the wavering nationalists among the Communists, it pointed out that the world conflict which was going on would determine the fate of all peoples the world over, including the Indian people. The victory of Nazism would mean worse slavery for India. "The victory of the alliance of the peoples in association with the Soviet Union means not only the liberation of the Nations enslaved by Fascism but the most favourable world conditions for the final liberation of the Indian people and all nations under foreign domination."¹ It specifically observed that "today the path to India's independence lies through the victory of the Soviet Union and its allies over Fascism."²

Immediately after this the Polit-Bureau of the C.P.I. met and came forward with the slogan of People's War in December, 1941. It held that they took time to discuss the new world situation because the majority of their comrades were in jail, the few that were underground were dispersed all over the country and suffered from the difficulties of an illegal hunted organization. The new situation was posed by the entry of Soviet Union and Japan in the War. The Soviet Union was a power of a new type, a people's power. The resolution went on :

"We are a practical party and in a new situation, it is our task not only to evolve a new form of struggle for it, but also to advance new slogans appropriate to the new stage, suiting the new form of our national movement. The key-slogan of our Party which guides all our practical political activity is : 'Make the Indian People Play A People's role in the People's War'."³ Only two alternatives faced the world, Fascism or Freedom. Later they contended that they did not change their policy for the sake of the Soviet Union but basically because of the new perspective for humanity. Soviet Union would successfully fulfil a liberationist role after the War. The slogan of People's War

1. *Ibid.*

2. *World News and Views*, October 18, 1941.

3. P. C. Joshi : *Communist Reply to Congress*, p. 45.

did not mean identification with the British Government, a distinction had to be made between peoples and their rulers. The Party came out in favour of co-operation in the war-efforts but it also urged that while so co-operating Nationalist India should strive to bring about national unity and make demands for independence. In a booklet called "Forward to Freedom", published in February, 1942, P. C. Joshi, the then Secretary of the Party, put forth the following demands for action :

1. To build up the United National Front in India, including the unity of the Congress, the Muslim League and all other political sections, on a common platform of resistance to Fascism.
2. On the basis of such a National Front to press the demand for a settlement and for a National Government with the united support of all sections.
3. While pressing the just political demand for a settlement and for a National Government, to co-operate wholeheartedly in the war-efforts and for the mobilisation of the people and to initiate unofficial measures of popular mobilisation under the leadership of the National Movement in order to strengthen the war effort and the capacity of National resistance against Fascism.
4. Resolute rejection of all policies of non-cooperation as fatal to the interests of the Indian people.¹ The attitude that the Party thus adopted was not only in contra-distinction to its attitude in the previous two years but also against the prevalent nationalist sentiment. Nowhere was this more marked than in the trade union field where they came forward with a halt to strike-struggles and urged co-operation with war-efforts. The C.P.I. retained this attitude throughout the remaining years of the War.

Co-operation or Non-Cooperation : Thus we see that after the sharp division of opinion between the various Left-groups in the earlier phase of the War, the issues in the second phase were the question of co-operation or non-co-operation with the War-effort. On the one extreme was the position taken up by the Roy-group which now came out

1. Quoted by R. P. Dutt in *India Today*, p. 523.

in favour of the slogan of an anti-Fascist People's War and advocated unconditional co-operation. On the other extreme was the position taken by the Congress Socialists, the Forward Blocists, the R.S.P., the R.C.P.I., who stood for uncompromising non-cooperation and the immediate starting of a struggle. The National Congress was still in favour of conditional co-operation. The Communists were in favour of "Co-operation first and then pressing for National Demands principle." There were arguments for and against all these positions and a furious controversy raised which did not leave unaffected even the A.I.T.U.C. and the All-India Kisan Sabha, but no decision could be immediately taken as in both these bodies there were people of all shades of opinion and the balance of forces was nearly even.

The announcement of the Atlantic Charter in September, 1941, brought some hope that something might be done for India but the clarification of Churchill that its principles did not apply to India and other Colonies considerably dampened enthusiasm. The Anglo-Soviet Treaty, article five of which stated that no party to the Treaty would interfere in the internal affairs of the other weakened the position of those who were advocating that after the termination of the War the Soviet would champion freedom of nations. Meanwhile, events were moving at a hurricane speed. By the end of 1941 both Japan and U.S.A. entered the War and the probability of the War coming to the doorsteps of India increased. The Congress reacted quickly to the gravity of the new situation and the W. C. meeting at the end of December, 1941 adopted a resolution in favour of the principle of armed resistance to the Axis as an ally of the United Nations. It said : "While there has been no change in the British policy towards India, the Committee must, nevertheless, take into consideration the new world situation which has arisen by the development of War and its approach to India. The sympathies of the Congress must inevitably lie with the peoples who are subject to aggression and are fighting for their freedom; but only a free and

independent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis.”¹ Following this Gandhi was relieved of the leadership of the Congress.

There were other turns towards favourable conditions for negotiation. The prominent leaders of the Congress were released from jail in December, 1941. In February, 1942, President Roosevelt made a broadcast in which he stated : “The Atlantic Charter applied not only to the parts of the world that border the Atlantic, but to the whole world.” Chiang Kai-shek visited India along with his wife in the same month, made public appeal to both India and Britain, and emphasized that there was no middle road between the two camps of aggression and anti-aggression. Meanwhile the Japanese were moving with a lightning speed, reaching Rangoon on March 8, 1942. On March 11, the Cripps’ Mission was announced.

The announcement of the Cripps’ Mission raised the hope that at long last a settlement could be reached. But after a series of confabulations with top-ranking Indian leaders of the different political parties Cripps announced the failure of his mission.

Towards August Movement : After the failure of the Cripps’ Mission events moved very fast in India. The Roy-group and the newly-formed Bolshevik Party had advocated acceptance of the Cripps’ offer. The Communists criticised the British Government for the failure of the Mission. P. C. Joshi, the Secretary of the C.P.I., maintained that “the failure of the Cripps’ Mission was not due to any unwillingness to negotiate on the part of the Indian National leaders.”²

Ben Bradley, writing in the Labour Monthly of May, 1942, declared that “Cripps failed because the proposals did not indicate the appreciation of the urgency of the situation, nor any generous approach to the aspirations of the Indian people.” The Communists maintained, however, that the

1. See, P. Sitaramayya : *History of National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 310.
2. *World News and Views*, May 1, 1942.

failure of the Mission could not be considered as a justification for opening a direct struggle for independence and they continued to advocate collaboration in the War efforts; meanwhile to continue exploring the basis of National Unity. Non-co-operation, they said, would be positively harmful to the national interests. The Socialists and the Blocists, on the other hand, now came out in favour of an immediate struggle on the ground that the sincerity of the British Government had been fully tested.

The failure of the Mission coupled with the unfortunate declarations of Lord Halifax, then British Ambassador to U.S.A., made while the negotiations were still in progress, and the broadcast of Cripps himself, weakened the position of Nehru and those inside the National Congress itself who were not in favour of starting a struggle. The attitude of "Take it or leave it" that accompanied the Cripps' proposals drove the Congress almost against its will to the August Resolution of August 8, 1942. How Nehru and others were finally won over by Gandhi who now came forward with his slogan of "Quit India" has been indicated by Gandhi himself in a letter he wrote to the Viceroy hardly a week after his arrest in August, 1942. Dated August 14, 1942, the letter read : "I have taken Jawaharlal Nehru as my measuring rod. His personal contacts made him feel much more the misery of the impending ruin of China and Russia than I can—than even you can. In that misery, he tried to forget his old quarrel with Imperialism. He dreads much more than I do the success of Fascism and Nazism. I have argued with him for days together. He fought against my position with a passion which I have no words to describe. But the logic of facts overwhelmed him. He yielded when he saw clearly that without the freedom of India that of the other two are in great jeopardy."¹

The march of subsequent events leading to the famous August Resolution, the arrest of all the top-ranking leaders of the Congress, the spontaneous revolt of the masses

1. Quoted by G. N. Acharya in *Freedom First*, p. 133.

in different parts of the country, etc., have been described by other competent authorities and need not detain us here.¹ There have also been arguments as to whether the most appropriate moment was chosen to start a struggle, and whether the movement was actually started by the Congress or not—but we need not repeat them here.

The groups that took a prominent part in this movement were the Congress Socialists, the Forward Bloc and the student community in particular. The movement at many places was violent but those taking part in it were not concerned with the ethics of violence or non-violence. Not to offer violence, unless attacked first by the Government forces, was frequently advocated, as for example, by the C.S.P., to whom it was a technique modifying to that traditionally advocated by Gandhī. A group of Congress Socialists set up a Central Directorate of the Indian National Congress to direct the movement from the underground. In a leaflet dated 10th August, 1942, it held that the struggle was a final struggle against imperialism and called for hartal throughout the country in the cities and villages. It urged interruptions of communications. On the same date and on similar line the Forward Bloc issued a leaflet called 'War of Independence'. By the end of the year the movement went down, largely because of the lack of preparation, lack of organization and severe Government repression. The Groups to the Left of the Congress but which tried to stop the movement were the Royists, the Bolsheviks and the Communists. They variously called it a sabotage movement. The Communist Party had been declared legal on July 22, 1942, and it came out strongly against any movement. In July, they started their paper "The Peoples War". Gradually Communists were released, though even in September, 1942, prominent Communists like Dange, Ghate, Bharadwaj were in jail. In the A.I.C.C. the opposition consisted almost exclusively of the Commu-

1. *Dev Das Gandhi (ed.), India Unreconciled. Bombay Provincial Congress Committee : March of Events (1941-45). P. Sitaramayya, History of the National Congress, Vol. II.*

nists. The Communist amendment to the August Resolution urged establishment of Congress-League unity on the basis of the principle of self-determination but was silent as to what should be done if there was no unity. They had come to occupy strategic positions in both the A.I.T.U.C. and the A.I.K.S. and they were able to keep both these bodies out of the movement, though under the influence of Nationalists and Congress Socialists political strikes of industrial workers took place in quite a few places, notably in Jamshedpur, Bombay and Ahmedabad.

The general attitude that the Communists adopted towards the movement was contained in a Manifesto issued by them in September, 1942.¹ The Manifesto appealed to the Government to give up repressive policy, to release Gandhi and other Congress leaders, to lift the ban on the Congress and open negotiations for a National Government. It criticised the policy of the Government as being a "stab" against the cause of British and American people and of the Soviet and Chinese people. It blamed the Government for plunging the country into "a grave and perilous crisis." It urged release of the national leaders. But it equally condemned the movement as being an act of sabotage, and criticised those taking part in it as "fifth columnists" and "agents of Fascism and promoters of anarchy". "The path along which the present national upsurge is directed is one of national suicide, not of national salvation and freedom", it said. It went on : "It makes the national movement the prey of bureaucratic provocation in the name of struggle. It creates a mass basis for the fifth column activity in the name of patriotism. It is leading the nation to a state of moral and political disruption and paralysis which, far from helping the people to get their freedom, can only clear the path of the invader. Such is the disastrous culmination of policies of not relying upon the strength of the people, that is, on national unity, and leaving the initiative in the hands of the imperialist bureau-

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1942, Vol. II, p. 211-13.

cracy.”¹ It was not a policy based on faith in our people as the makers of our country’s destiny. It pointed out that the way out of the situation was not in “countering repression as imperialists, loyalists and Royists suggest nor in the direction of intensifying the offensive as Forward Blocists, Congress Socialists and Congressmen propose.”² It decided upon a three-fold plan of action to properly educate the people : (I) Organising a country-wide campaign for unity; (II) a campaign of persistent political explanation among the kisans, workers, students and militant Congressmen; (III) country-wide propaganda among the Hindu and Muslim masses for Congress-League unity. They resolved to re-establish the leadership of the Unions and the Party in the industrial centres.

These were also the general lines adopted by the First Annual Conference of the C.P.I. held in May, 1943 which did not take any other decision of importance.³ Its importance lay in the fact that it was the First Annual Conference of the Party that the Communists were able to hold in the open.

While this was their attitude, they made appreciable advance both in respect of the growth of their party and increase in their influence in the A.I.T.U.C. and the A.I.K.S. While the membership of the Party stood at about 5,000 in 1942, it rose to about 16,000 by the time the First Party Congress was held in May, 1943.

The growth of their influence in the Kisan Sabha is evidenced by the fact that in March, 1945 Communist Muzaffar Ahmad was elected its president. The membership of this body by this time had risen to nearly 8,25,000. The A.I.T.U.C. had by this time about 5,09,000 members. The Communists also extended their influence in the organizations of students, youth and women.

The role of the Communists during the memorable days of the August movement evoked sharp reactions and

1. P. C. Joshi : *Communist Reply*, p. 10 .
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Indian Annual Register*. 1943, Vol. I, pp. 304-307.

for long provided a dead weight for the Party. The situation, indeed, was unprecedentedly abnormal and called for consummate courage and skill, which the Party leadership was unable to provide. As it was, its policy not only stemmed from an inadequate comprehension of the strength and weaknesses of the rival forces engaged in War, but it was also based upon an over-exaggerated assumption that co-operation or non-co-operation with the War efforts by the mass-organizations it controlled would make a material difference to the outcome of the War. While this antipathy of a party of revolution to a revolutionary situation pregnant with rich potentialities would continue to be a matter of controversy, the act of the Party in denouncing those who participated in the movement as 'fifth columnists' and 'Fascist agents' was for long regarded as unpardonable by the nationalist opinion in the country. In this there also entered the whispering campaign that the Party was being financed by the Government in its propaganda activities.

The origin of the new Parties of the Left : A peculiar feature of Leftism during the World War II was the mushroom growth of a good many new parties of the Left. Some of these were in existence before the War as Left-groups but now crystallised themselves into independent parties outside the Congress, while others were entirely new. Among the parties that thus emerged were : the Forward Bloc, the Radical Democratic Party, the Revolutionary Communist Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Bolshevik Party.

The Radical Democratic People's Party : Founded by Roy in December, 1940, this Party held its First Conference in December, 1940,¹ when it formulated its programme. The Party was completely independent of, and outside the National Congress, and it was based upon a new theory of revolution which Roy was now advocating. The Party never succeeded in building up popular support mainly for two reasons. Firstly, because no party that collaborated in

1. See, *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, p. 344.

War effort could gain support, especially after August, 1942 when Congressmen, Congress Socialists, Blocists, etc., wore martyr's badge; secondly, because of the revelation that the Party was receiving Rs. 13,000 from the Government. To this Roy followed another disastrous policy, when he brought about a split in the recently united A.I.T.U.C. and founded the Indian Federation of Labour in November, 1941 on purely political considerations. Roy himself became the General Secretary of the Federation. Roy's justification for the new organization was that the A.I.T.U.C. had not adopted a correct attitude to the anti-Fascist War.

The Radical Democratic Party was not strictly a Socialist Party, nor did Roy ever pretend that it was so. According to Roy, the impending revolution in India would essentially be a Bourgeois Democratic Revolution.¹ This task could only be performed by a multi-class Party consisting of the working-class, the peasantry and the petty-bourgeois elements under the leadership of the urban petty-bourgeois radicals. The proletariat, while it would be an integral part of it, could not be its leader, for it was so backward that it could not even play the role of a conscious revolutionary.²

The National Congress would have been such a party but experience had shown that no transformation of the Congress, in the directions desired for its playing a successful role, was possible. It was under Gandhi's leadership which was averse to any revolutionary ideas. This "crystallisation of the reactionary elements as the machinery of the Congress makes it impossible for the revolutionary forces to organise themselves into a political party inside the Congress."³ The other organizations of the Left also could not perform the task that was required. The Forward Bloc had no ideology, it subscribed to Gandhism and it was only out to teach Gandhi "what Gandhism means". The C.S.P. had also surrendered itself to Gandhism, while

1. *M. N. Roy, Scientific Politics*, p. 72.

2. *Ibid*, p. 78.

3. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 148.

the C.P.I. was based on an ill-digested Marxism in that it believed in the proletarian leadership of the National movement. Besides, both C.S.P. and C.P.I. regarded revolution as imminent.

According to Roy revolution was not imminent as none of the conditions which ordinarily make for a revolution were present. The most important factor of all, that of revolutionary consciousness, was conspicuous by its absence. The role of the R.D.P. was to create this consciousness by first providing the nucleus of conscious Radicals which would in course of time grow into a mighty revolutionary force. The theory of revolution upon which it would be based was in the words of Roy, Twentieth-Century Jacobinism. By it Roy meant a special form of ideology evolved out of the application of Marxism to the problems of Democratic Revolution. He maintained that the prevailing social and economic background in India was that belonging to the 16th Century but the revolutionaries chronologically belonged to the 20th Century. This social condition imposed certain limitations upon Marxism.

The special ideology that would evolve would not be complete Marxism, in as much as the programme would not be that of a Socialist revolution but it would equally be not of a democratic revolution as ordinarily understood. It would not be complete Marxism because the class struggle would not be its driving force, neither could the proletariat be its mainstay. Roy observed: "The idea of developing the anti-imperialist struggle by sharpening the class-struggle is sheer humbug. If you want to create a united anti-imperialist front, you must emphasize the cohesiveness of social relations and the uniting factors. The only United Front possible under the given conditions is the United Front of peasants, workers and poor middle-class as integral parts of the petty-bourgeoisie only as petit-bourgeoisie, as impoverished town-dwellers, will the working-class itself realize its immediate demands. Only as such it will exercise hegemony in the present stage of

revolution. That is how the working-class of Paris acted in the Great French Revolution.”¹

This revolution being a peculiar form of revolution, the State to be created by it would also be peculiar in that it would neither be a parliamentary democratic State, nor a dictatorship of the proletariat but it would be such as would strengthen the base of the Socialist Revolution that would occur thereafter.

The Bolshevik Party of India : We have already referred to the beginnings of the B.P.I. The Party expressed its loyalty to the C.I. and its line, and called itself the Party of Lenin and Stalin. One of the documents of the Party stated that eighty per cent of its members were composed of factory workers, seven per cent were composed of poor peasants and the remaining of the poor middle-class. They contended that their Party was the only Party that was keeping high the banner of the Communist International in India.

Up to June, 1941, the Bolshevik Party regarded the War as an imperialist War and thought that time was opportune for preparing and launching a revolutionary struggle. The National Congress in their view could not lead this revolution; and it was not even interested in it. Though formally opposed to War, the Congress had been giving material support to the war-effort. The individual Satyagraha, that was started by Gandhi towards the end of 1940, was primarily undertaken with a view to regain a hold upon the masses, and to sidetrack the revolutionary movement which was expanding everywhere. The Party supported the Forward Bloc and Bose till he was on Indian soil. Even at Ramgarh, when the Congress Socialists and the Communists defected Bose, they supported him.

After Hitler's attack on Soviet Russia the Bolsheviks, like the Communists, came to regard the War as a People's War, though, like the Communists, they took some time to arrive at that conclusion. This delay, according to a Bol-

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 112.

shevik document, was due to the "bourgeois nationalist sentiments" prevailing in their ranks.

Thenceforward the Bolshevik Party advocated unconditional support to the war-efforts of the Government. It was, therefore, in favour of accepting the Cripps' offers. According to it the Cripps' proposal was rejected by the Indian bourgeoisie because, being afraid of a revolution in the wake of the victory of the United Nations and being sure of a Fascist victory, it was not interested in fighting against Fascism. After June, 1941, under popular pressure, it (i.e. the National Congress) adopted an attitude of formal support to the War but none-the-less pursued a policy of material opposition and sabotage of the war-efforts. The August Resolution was in pursuance of the same policy. A document of the Party said that the mill-owners fully supported the August Movement, that the workers were asked by them and their agents to leave their places of work and to come back after three months. It stated that in many places workers were given three months' pay as a bonus.¹

But the Bolsheviks did not regard that the Congress-bourgeoisie as being Fascist in the manner of M. N. Roy, or that it was anti-Fascist as maintained by the Communists. They described the Congress leaders as pro-Fascist. The triumph of Fascism in Germany had infected it with Fascist tendencies although high finance capital, which was the base of Fascism, was absent in India. For that reason it was not yet Fascist, and a further reason why the term was inapplicable followed from the existence of rivalry among the different sections of the Capitalists—the Muslims, the Hindus and the Domiciled Europeans.

The Bolshevik Party was almost the only Party in India to put forth a demand in October, 1942 that the National Congress should withdraw the August Resolution as a pre-condition of any settlement with the Government. It said that it would demand the release of the Congress leaders and

1. *Bolshevik Party : Indian Politics (1941-44)*, p. 27.

the formation of an all-parties government only after that unconditional withdrawal. A resolution of its Central Committee in early 1943 stated that the programme of all those who were opposed to Fascism must be (a) liquidation of the Sabotage Movement and enhancement of the anti-Fascist Front, (b) simultaneously to continue the defence of India and ultimately to wage an offensive war. Another of its resolutions in December, 1943 said that in order to develop the anti-Fascist Front the Bolsheviks must break the economic front of the bourgeoisie and that they must destroy the influence of the bourgeoisie over the masses. It admitted that the Government of India was not a People's Front Government in composition and that its role should be estimated by the historically progressive tasks that it was compelled to fulfil and not merely by its inner composition. But it also maintained that the tasks to be accomplished were those of a People's Government and, therefore, even though major changes were not possible under the existing circumstances, it could be improved in many ways. It pledged to continue the struggle with the Government for that.

It may be noted, however, that on the question of defining attitude to the Quit India movement sharp differences of opinion arose among the Bolsheviks. Mazumdar, the leader of the original Labour Party wing inside the Party, supported the movement and was arrested towards the end of 1942. Mazumdar and his associates still regarded the War as an imperialist War. But a majority opposed Mazumdar's line. He was expelled from the Party in 1945.

The Revolutionary Socialist Party of India

The Revolutionary Socialist group referred to earlier, styled itself as the R.S.P.I. at the time of the Ramgarh Congress in 1940. It regarded the War as an imperialist War from beginning to end and urged revolutionary anti-War actions. It all along supported Bose. It enthusiastically supported the Quit India movement, and its leader, Jogesh Chatterjee, remained in hiding for long.

The R. C. P. I.

Tagore christened his group as the R.C.P.I. in 1942. It was upon the principles of Marxism-Leninism but was opposed to Stalinism. The R.C.P.I. held that the second imperialist War started in 1945. The War continued to be an imperialist War even after the Soviet Union was involved in it, but a minority inside it tried to raise the slogan of a People's War. The Party all along opposed the War and urged for the preparation of a Civil War, and the violent overthrow of the British rule. It opposed the Cripps' proposals and supported the Quit India movement. The Party worked in close co-ordination with the C.S.P. and the Forward Bloc during the August movement. They supported Bose to the extent he fought for national freedom but were against his 'collaboration' with fascism. However, the Party held that the Bourgeois Congress, being afraid of a revolution, sabotaged the movement.¹ It criticised the C.P.I. for betrayal.

Tagore felt that the R.C.P.I. arose due to the complete bankruptcy of leftism in India. They defined their leftism only in relation to the Congress in India. They suffered from ideological blunders, opportunism and organisational weaknesses. The true test of leftism in India was recognition of the Congress as a bourgeois organization, the bourgeoisie as counter-revolutionary, necessity of independent class-organization of the workers and peasants, and regarding bourgeois revolution as a proletarian revolution. The R.C.P.I. alone was a revolutionary leftist party.²

The Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India

During the autumn of 1941 was formed the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India, with Trotskyite affiliations. It openly styled itself as a section of the Fourth International. Among its leaders of this period were Indra Sen, Ajit Roy, etc. Its organ for some time was New Spark. The Party established, with the Ceylon Socialist Party and a Burmese

1. S. N. Tagore : *Revolution and Quit India, Introduction.*

2. *Opt. Cit., Chapter II.*

group, the Federation of Bolshevik-Leninist Parties of Burma, Ceylon and India.

The Party started work on the basis of a thesis entitled 'The Revolution in India', adopted in the autumn of 1941 by the Formation Committee of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India. The thesis expressed its opposition to the Comintern line and held that it was based upon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and upon the line laid down by the Fourth International. Like most Left-parties, the B.L.P.I. regarded the war-situation in India as one of approaching revolution.¹ The British imperialism had impeded the real industrial development of India; the Indian bourgeoisie, being dependent upon the imperialistic bourgeoisie, was compromising by nature. The Indian National Congress was neither interested in mass struggle, nor in revolution. The nature of the impending revolution was bourgeois-democratic but it might immediately pass over to the proletarian revolution.²

The existing Left-parties in India could not carry on the task of the revolution in India. The Forward Bloc, the C.S.P. and the R.D.P. were merely 'defensive coloration of the bourgeoisie before the masses'. The C.S.P. had 'capitulated' to the Congress leadership; the R.D.P. was becoming a 'managing-agency' of the War-efforts. Even the C.P.I., which could have afforded Marxian leadership had served the Gandhian leaders. They constituted a legal opposition within the Congress. They were bureaucratically organised and were subservient to the Comintern. The parties to the left of the C.P.I., like the Bolshevik Party and the R.C.P.I., occupied more or less a centrist position, without a clear-cut revolutionary policy and without making a decisive break, organizationally and politically, with the Comintern. They were merely disgusted with the bureaucratic leaders of the C.P.I. and their re-

1. T. Tate Memorial Publication, Edinburg : *The Revolution in India.*
2. *Ibid.*

actionary policies, and were unable to offer to the working-class the independent leadership it required. Hence the necessity of the B.L.P.I.¹

The Party aimed at the establishment of a workers' and peasants' government under the leadership of the working-class. It gave the slogan of a revolutionary C.A. on universal adult suffrage, to be convened after the capture of power through the revolutionary struggle of workers and peasants on the basis of a United Front.

The B.L.P.I. regarded the War as an imperialist War from the beginning to the end, and called for a revolutionary utilisation of the opportunity.

C O N C L U S I O N :

During the War the Left was concerned mainly with the problem of national independence, but it differed on the assumptions as to how freedom could be had. The War also witnessed the emergence of some new left-groups.

1. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER NINE

The Left-Wing on the eve of Independence

(June, 1945-August, 1947).

Post-War world witnessed a phenomenal growth of national liberation struggles all over the world. India was also in the vortex. At the close of the Second World War the political scene in India was highly explosive. The relative calm that had become a marked feature—at least on the surface—of the nationalist politics since the happenings in the wake of the August, 1942 Movement began to disappear. Undoubtedly the shimmering political discontent had base in the acute economic condition of the masses. The food position continued to deteriorate. Bad harvest and rising prices, coupled with the usual exploitation by landlords and money-lenders added to the discontent of the peasant masses. In the industrial field the closing down of factories due to curtailed production, consequential sacking of workers, cut in real wages, high prices etc. brought the situation to a boiling point. The condition of the low-paid office employees was worse. These also found expression in out-bursts of anti-imperialist demonstrations and strikes. The tone of this new phase was set up with the release of the members of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress in June, 1945. Previous to this there had been a controversy as to whether the National Congress, in passing the August Resolution, had authorised the launching of the August movement and whether the subsequent events were to be regarded as Congress 'movements'. As emphasized in the last chapter the Congress Socialists and the Forward Blocists were in the vanguard of the post-August 9 upheavals. Even Gandhites like K. G. Mashruwala and Pattabhi Sittaramayya supported them. In an article in the Harijan (August 23, 1942) Mashruwala

argued that the interruption of bridges, rails, roads and other means of communication were quite in consonance with the spirit of non-violence. In the famous Andhra circular Pattabhi had more or less argued in the same vein. But in his reply to Tottenham's pamphlet dated July 14, 1943 Gandhijee did not quite agree with these assumptions. Indeed differences in the Central Directorate of the A.I.C.C. which had directed the August Movement from the underground became apparent when the views of Gandhijee were known during his famous fast in jail in the Agha Khan Palace. The Gandhites, thereafter, either gave a stop to the movement or else constituted Satyagraha Committees. The Congress Socialists and those elements who wanted to carry on the struggle for freedom irrespective of any consideration of violence or non-violence then constituted a separate underground organization, 'the Azad Seva Dal.' When Gandhijee came out of jail he advised them all to surrender to the police. The Gandhites obeyed but the Socialists did not.¹ In his first letter to the fighters for freedom, J. P. Narain argued that the post-August events, by and large, had been on non-violent lines. There was also a controversy as to the propriety of passing that resolution. These doubts and confusions were set at rest by the utterances of both Vallabhbhai Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru after their release. Immediately after his release Nehru declared that he took full responsibility for all that had happened after 9th August, 1942. At the A.I.C.C. meeting in Bombay held in September, 1945, Patel stated that far from withdrawing the 'Quit India' resolution, it was time to extend it to a 'Quit Asia' resolution. The A.I.C.C. itself in a resolution commended the courage and spirit of the people in rising spontaneously after the arrest of their leaders, though it regretted the fact that the people had not, at some places, acted in accordance with the principles of non-violence. Later on there was a gradual cooling down of the spirit of glorification of the August events

1. Narain : *Congress Socialist Party*, pp. 48-52.

and emphasis was on non-violent approach. It is to be noted that this resolution was supported by Narendra Dev; though Socialists later became critical of this approach. The effect of these utterances and resolutions was to heighten the emotional tone of nationalist India and to create a fresh outburst of nationalist sentiments. The second half of 1945 marked the beginning of a mass upsurge that continued intermittently all through 1946 to the first half of 1947. This feeling rose to its highest pitch when the I.N.A. Trials against the former officers of the Indian National Army under Subhas Chandra Bose were staged in November, 1945. There were demonstrations in Calcutta and elsewhere. This sent a fresh wave of militant nationalism which was also demonstrated in the revolt which broke out in February, 1946 within the Indian Navy and which extended to both the officers and other ranks. In January, 1946 Air Force men had gone on strike in Bombay. It also found expression in a general strike-wave among the industrial workers. During 1945, 7,47,000 workers were involved in strikes and the number of working days lost was 405,4,000. During 1946, the number of striking workers rose to 19,61,000; and the working days lost were 12,717,000; that is more than three times the total of working days lost in 1945. During the first 8 months of 1947 the corresponding numbers were 13,23,000 and 1,11,95,863, that is nearly the total of 1946 in two-thirds of a year.

Similarly, there were demonstrations against the sending of the Indian troops to quell national movements in Indo-China and Indonesia. From towards the second-half of 1946 the peasant movement also got momentum, and there were peasant demonstrations in different parts of the country. During 1946-47 the movement in the states also acquired fresh intensity, particularly in Kashmir, Jaipur, Bharatpur, Marwar, Indore etc. Unfortunately, the mass-movements in the country were marred by outbursts of communal frenzy in 1946 and 1947.

The nature of the situation presented problems both for the British Government and for the National Congress.

From the point of view of the former it was evident that it could no longer count on the solidarity of the Army and the Services, its two traditional pillars of support. The revolt of the Indian Navy ratings disclosed the permeation of the spirit of nationalism into the ranks of the Armed forces which had so far been politically neutral. By the end of the War the Services, which had been overworked, had also become demoralised and under the circumstances any decision to continue the old rule would have necessitated the stationing of a purely European Army of an unprecedented size. Such an undertaking for Britain, with the weakened resources at its disposal in the post-War years, would have been difficult, if not impossible.

The problems before the National Congress were no less intriguing. It was evident that considering the rising nationalist feeling, as expressed in the happenings after 9th August, any future struggle would have far surpassed the bounds set by the Congress. Moreover, the Congress leaders were themselves tired and weary after the trials and tribulations of successive movements and were in no mood to launch a new movement, though on occasions they held up the threat of it as a bargaining counter with the British Government. They preferred negotiated settlement unless a struggle was forced. In fact, in this new situation, the National Congress was no longer the exclusive master of the nationalist opinion. The rise of the Muslim League, which regarded the Congress as a greater enemy than imperialism, undermined the position of the Congress at least among the Muslim masses; hence future satyagraha would inevitably have meant a conflict with the League. Indeed the League held out such threats again and again. In August, 1946 it incited communal riots in Calcutta and elsewhere. The Congress leaders well realised that the alternative to a negotiated settlement was a great upheaval. Thus, speaking in New Delhi in March, 1946, Nehru said : "If the people of India are suddenly confronted with the

prospect of no independence coming by agreement, there will inevitably be an enormous upheaval in India.”¹

The British Government chose to set the ball rolling with the announcement by Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy, of new proposals in June, 1945. The advent of a Labour Government in Britain more committed to independence soon after only hastened the process. Negotiations developed, plans were advanced and ultimately this process culminated in the final transfer of power into Indian hands in August, 1947.

The various left-groups in India took definite stands in regard to these developments. Firstly, we shall discuss their viewpoints concerning various negotiations and plans that led to the transfer of power, and the transfer itself. Secondly, we shall discuss their attitudes on the question of communalism, Pakistan and National Unity. And finally, we shall take note of the state of the various left-groups on the eve of independence.

The Left-Groups and Transfer of Power

In their treatment of the various negotiations for the transfer of power that took place between the Congress and the League on the one hand and the British Government on the other, all the Left-groups except the Radical Democratic Party of M. N. Roy, took their stands on the fundamental assumption underlying all Left-politics so far, namely, that it was impossible to gain complete independence through any process of negotiations and compromise with imperialism. Their attitudes at different stages were guided by this general assumption and, therefore, the various criticisms that they made of the different plans were regarded as mere elaborations of it.

The Radical Democratic Party

Of all the Left-groups the R.D.P. of Roy was the only group that did not refute the idea that freedom could be had as a gift from the British Parliament. In the last Chapter

1. *Indian Annual Register, 1946, Vol. I, Chronicle of News.*

we saw how Roy believed that the outbreak of the War gave a great fillip to popular revolutionary movements all over the world, and how he believed that the close of the War would witness the occurrence of such revolutions in a number of countries leading to national emancipation of the colonial peoples. Roy believed that the electoral victory of the Labour Party in Britain in 1945 was an expression of such a revolutionary upsurge. 'Vanguard', the organ of the R.D.P., welcomed this victory in a leader entitled, "Commonwealth Centre goes Socialist". Roy regarded it not only as a victory of the socialist forces in Great Britain but also as an inauguration of similar victories in all the countries of the Empire and the Commonwealth. This analysis followed from his new view that the Labour Party stood for international socialism and that it would not only grant political independence to all such countries but, what was more important, it would hand over power only to the Labour and Socialist forces in these countries. When, therefore, the Labour Party initiated its policy towards India with the Wavell-plan for an Interim Government, Roy criticised what he termed a 'non-Socialist' approach of entering into negotiation with the reactionary bourgeois parties in India, such as the Congress and the League. 'The Other India', a journal of the R.D.P., characterised this as undemocratic and as a "medieval approach to a political problem of the twentieth century"¹ and it observed that the British Labour had let down 'Indian Democracy'. The same theme was elaborated at a greater length in a symposium published by the R.D.P. and entitled "History is not made this way".

The criticism of the R.D.P. towards the Parliamentary Delegation and the Cabinet Mission Plan arose logically from their basic assumptions. At this period the Party adopted a thesis called "The Indian Problem; Democratic Approach", wherein it indicated the lines along which it wanted the British Labour Government to proceed in

1. *Other India*, 9.8.45.

regard to the transfer of power. The whole purpose of the constitutional settlement, it said, should be to ensure that India secured a constitution which would establish a free and democratic state. This, however, could not be achieved simply by patching up differences among the major parties none of which represented the real interests of the Indian people. India was a backward country and a party could gain good deal of popularity by exploiting religious credulity, blind faith and hero worship. Therefore, the representative character of the "so-called parties can't be ascertained without raising the question whether they represented the interests of the people or their backwardness."¹ The Congress and the League did not represent the real interests of the people. They were Parties of vested interests. Therefore, any transfer of power to them meant handing over the innocent Indian masses to the mercy of the exploiting classes. A 'National Government' controlled by ambitious Indian capitalism and its party (the Congress) would be a fascist dictatorship.

The R.D.P. believed that a really democratic constitution must be based on a radical reconstruction of society. The minimum requirements of such a constitution were that fundamental changes must be made in the property-laws relating to land, industry, and in the first stage primary voters must be organised in People's Committees in order to ensure their control over the machinery of Government. The Party believed that it was the duty of the British Parliament under a Labour Government to create such conditions. It, therefore, required the British Parliament to adopt a more positive attitude towards the Indian problem and to regard it as a "responsibility to see that the minimum provisions necessary for ensuring a stable democracy in India are embodied in the future constitutions."² The conditions that the R.D.P. stipulated as necessary accompaniments to the transfer of power, were in fact absent.

1. *Radical Democratic Party : The Indian Problem : Democratic Approach.*
2. *Ibid.*

Elections for the C.A. were being held on restricted franchise. Almost the whole press throughout the country was controlled by the bourgeois Congress. Moreover, there was no provision for democratic participation of the Indian States. The R.D.P. demanded elections to C.A. on universal adult-franchise.

But despite these objections to the approach of the British Labour, the R.D.P. welcomed the arrival of the Cabinet Mission. Roy had still a hope that the Mission would adopt a 'democratic' approach. In this hope he addressed an open letter¹ to the Mission wherein he suggested three cardinal features which should be contained in any new advance. Firstly, a declaration of complete freedom for India phrased in clear and unambiguous terms. Substantially, it should state a time-limit of one year for the transfer of power and have provision for a full democratic constitution. Secondly, that there should be a full political and economic democracy for all people with provision for submitting any such constitutions to a referendum of the adult population, (if such a provision had not already been framed by a C.A. based on adult-franchise), and lastly, the formation of a provisional people's Government at the Centre. He again pointed out the unsatisfactory nature of the Labour's approach and added : The duty of British Socialists in power is not fatuous liberalism, but to liberate the Indian masses from Colonial slavery, and help them ascertain the democratic right of self-determination."²

In view of this approach of his it is understandable that Roy later became highly critical of the Cabinet Mission Plan. He started propounding the thesis that behind "the apparently liberal policy" of the British Labour was an 'essentially reactionary Indian policy' and that the plan was "an unholy alliance between decayed Imperialism and totalitarian nationalism".³ He now came closer to the view of the other Left-groups that a revolution was the only way

1. *Other India* (15.5.46).

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Other India*, 15.6.46.

out of the situation and that preparations should be made for it, though he did not believe that a revolution was immediately imminent. However, the announcement of the White Paper on India in February, 1947, was to bring yet further modifications in Roy's view. He still regarded it as an undemocratic procedure but thought that it was a definite departure from the old policy in that it set a time-limit for independence. Though opposed to some of its features like partitions and the transfer of power to a particular party, Roy resigned himself to the plan of June, 1947, under which the transfer of power took place, but he believed that in India people had still to struggle hard to establish a full political and economic democracy.

The Congress Socialist Party and the Transfer of Power

True to its fundamentally anti-imperialist character, the Congress Socialist Party was all along opposed to any idea of having a negotiated settlement on the question of freedom. Having come out of the fire of the August Movement, the Party persistently urged the National Congress not to pin faith in negotiations and constitutionalism but to prepare for launching a revolutionary struggle for the capture of power, with the August resolution as the guiding star. Immediately after his release in early 1946, Jai Prakash Narain urged the use of mass sanctions in achieving complete overthrow of imperialism.

In his third letter to the fighters for freedom Narain said that an all-out War of independence would issue and that the Constituent Assembly would be no solution. He advocated waging of national struggle by forging mass sanctions. This implied the psychological preparation of the masses for a struggle, and the building up of organizations of the masses.¹

Writing in the *Janata*, (January 26, 1947), the organ of the Party, Narain said: "The only way is to renew the demand of 'Quit India' and to mobilise the people in a final challenge with the foreign power. It is that power which

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 5.

is our primary enemy and which instigates and supports the reactionary forces in this country. It is that power which has to be destroyed first. I believe that in the fire of revolution alone can be burned down the edifices of imperialism together with the supporting edifices of communalism and feudalism.”

They also argued that the tendency to indulge in compromising talks indicated the weakness, both of the Congress and the British Government. But real freedom would come only if India acquired the necessary strength for capture of power.¹ Therefore, the Congress should concentrate its energy more in mobilising the strength that had already been acquired and in increasing this further.

The Party, in the part it had played in the August Movement, had taken up the method of open mass struggle, and it was in favour of the further use of such methods by extending them still further. A great controversy developed over the question of methods and the rival merits of violence and non-violence in prosecuting the struggle for independence. During the War the National Congress had given up its creed of non-violence in offering conditional armed cooperation in the war-measures. The Congress Socialists were concerned that the Congress should not reaffirm its faith in the old creed. Therefore, when the Congress Working Committee meeting in January, 1946 reaffirmed its faith in non-violence, both Aruna Asaf Ali, and Achyut Patwardhan, who had just come out of the underground, on the cancellation of their warrant of arrest, addressed a letter to the Congress President criticising the new stand.² A serious clash of opinion occurred in March, 1946 between Gandhi and Aruna Asaf Ali. Occasion provided itself when Gandhi had denounced the February, 1946 revolt of the Royal Indian Navy ratings, while the C.S.P. had given the revolt its enthusiastic support. Aruna issued a long statement in which she bitterly attacked Gandhi. She ended : “The people are no more interested

1. *Jai Prakash Narain : Towards Struggle.*

2. *Indian Annual Register, 1946, Vol. I, News, p. 215.*

in the ethics of violence and non-violence, they want to resist oppression. They are no more cowards.”¹ She also contended Gandhi’s assertion that the rulers were quitting. The anti-British front was the only front for a genuine and lasting Hindu-Muslim unity, and for national freedom. Gandhi on the contrary, maintained that the millions in India would not have been awakened but for the open, unarmed struggle. He added : “I don’t read the 1942-events as does the brave lady. It is good that the people rose spontaneously. It was bad that some or many resorted to violence.”²

The controversy did not end at this point and the more it developed, it revealed the sharp differences of conception between the policy of negotiation and that of open direct struggle. The Congress Socialists criticised the Congress leaders for abjuring the path of revolution and taking to constitutionalism. They even charged that the Congress was being converted into a parliamentary party. The Congress leaders, on the contrary, asked the Socialists not to doubt the intentions of the British Government. They even charged the Congress Socialists with having defied non-violence. It was in this atmosphere that Narain chose to pursue the issue. Addressing his first public meeting at Patna after his release, he observed : “We are charged with having defied non-violence. I have as much faith in non-violence as Maulana Azad has. Maulana Azad has as much faith in violence as I have. I understand Mahatmaji’s non-violence. I bow before it. But since I don’t possess that much soul-force, I think it easy to fight with guns. And after all, what does Congress want ? Did not Maulana Azad say once that if a National Government was established—only with limited political power—he would fight with guns against the Japanese ? Are not Japanese lives human lives ? Are only British lives human lives, so that to use arms against them is to defy non-violence ? The Congress

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 127

2. *Ibid*

itself expressed its willingness to defy non-violence on two occasions since 1942. In my opinion, non-violence is being utilised or what in English is called exploited for power-politics.”¹ The first post-War Conference of the Party congratulated the Nation for the magnificent revolt of 1942. They also praised Bose for the heroic and matchless deeds.

As in the pre-war days, the Congress Socialists again began to argue that the Congress should be transformed into a vigorous and disciplined instrument of revolution, by associating itself with mass organizations of peasants, workers, students and youth.² The erection of these mass sanctions for freedom included, firstly a psychological preparation of the masses for struggle, and secondly, the building up of the organizations of the masses.³

It is to be noted that the Congress Socialists' opposition to a negotiated settlement was not only due to their doubt regarding the sincerity of any British Government to transfer full power but also because of a lurking fear that this would not mean transfer of power to the toiling millions. Narendra Dev said in this connection : “It would be self-delusion to think that the middle classes would, after winning freedom, willingly transfer all power to the toiling masses. This has never happened in history. India is no exception.”⁴ Their stress on revolution was also prompted by this fear; as the path of negotiation was chosen by the Congress for contrary reasons.

As the left-wing of the National Congress, the Congress Socialists thought it necessary to impress upon Congressmen that in entering into negotiation, the Congress was going back against the letter and spirit of the ‘Quit India’ Resolution. They pointed out to them that, in the event of these negotiations failing, simultaneous preparations should be made for a struggle. They even argued that the British Government was entering into compromising talks with the

1. Jai Prakash Narain : *Towards Struggle*, pp. 213-14.

2. N. Dev : *Opt. Cit.*, pp. 180-85.

3. Narain : *Opt. Cit.*, p. 227.

4. N. Dev : *Socialism and National Revolution*, pp. 180-81.

sole purpose of dissipating the national revolutionary forces by creating illusions of freedom and then to force a fight on the unprepared Congress.¹

In addition to differences in their fundamental approach to the problem of transfer of power, the Congress Socialists also variously criticised the stands taken by the Congress at different stages of negotiations, though they themselves sometimes took inconsistent stands. They were opposed to Simla Conference and the Wavell Plan. At the outset, in September, 1945 when the A.I.C.C. decided to contest elections, Mrs. Kamaladebi, on behalf of the Congress Socialists, moved an amendment to the main resolution in which she sought to clarify the object of the Congress in contesting the elections. In her view the aim, which should take Congress into the election, should be the need for demonstrating the will of the people on the issue of the immediate transfer of power and the framing of a Constitution. She further wanted that the Congress should seek an immediate mandate of the people on the fundamental necessity of creating a C.A. possessing sovereign power and consisting of the representatives of both the provinces and the States on the basis of adult-suffrage. Supporting the amendment Narendra Dev observed that what the Wavell-Plan offered was nothing more than the old Cripps' Plan.² He held that pledged as they were to the August Resolution, electoral contests should be only a form of preparation for struggle. They should enter the legislature only to make revolutionary use of them.

When the Congress decided to enter the Interim Government and to participate in the Constituent Assembly, the Congress Socialists were opposed to both these steps. They were opposed to a restricted and curbed C.A. and stood for a fully-elected sovereign C.A. Narain called for preparation for a country-wide revolutionary action. The C.A. would not achieve much. This approach also defined their

1. Narain : *Opt. Cit.*, p. 212.

2. *Indian Annual Register*, 1945, Vol. II, p. 96.

attitude to the Cabinet Mission. They argued that the Cabinet Mission plan could not give India real independence. They were particularly opposed to the grouping plan with its weak-centre having little control over finances. The Constituent Assembly that was envisaged was not the type of C.A. that Nehru had for years popularised.¹ If these two schemes were not rejected, they at least wanted the A.I.C.C. to issue directives to its members both in the C.A. and the Interim Government. The directives to the C.A. members included an oath not to rest until a really democratic constitution for fully independent India was framed. The directives that were to be given to the Congress members in the Interim Government would require them to create the necessary conditions, by such means as the withdrawal of British troops, to endow the constitution-making-body with effective sovereign power.² But the party took a neutral attitude at the A.I.C.C. meeting in 1946 which approved of the formation of the Interim Government. This policy came in for sharp criticism inside the Party. The Party also prohibited its members from entering either the C.A. or the Interim Government. However, it has to be noted that there was a section inside the Party which wanted Lohia to accept the offer of General Secretaryship and the Socialists to enter the C.A. Writing much later Ashok Mehta held that the decision to boycott C.A. was a mistaken one.³ In the beginning Narain was also in favour of participating in the C.A. but he later modified his stand.

At the Delhi meeting of the A.I.C.C. in January, 1947 J. P. Narain opposed the Working Committee resolution and held that Nehru's speech raised false hopes. He felt that instead of negotiating with the British Government, the Congress should mobilise the new strength which the country had acquired. This line could be also seen at the February-March, 1947 annual conference of the Party at Cawnpore when the Socialists urged launching of a campaign for

1. *Indian Annual Register, 1946, Vol. II, p. 137.*

2. *Janata, March 21, 1948.*

3. *P.S.P. : Silver Jubilee Number, p. 71.*

national unity, and the withdrawal of British with their troops because they felt that internal problem could not be solved in the presence of the British.

The Attlee declarations of February, 1947 gave rise to certain waverings in the attitude of the Party. Narendra Dev in a statement characterised it as going back on the Cabinet Mission Plan. There was a tendency to suggest that at long last power was going to be transferred to the Indian hands, but it was specifically argued that this was a step forced upon imperialism.¹ Generally, however, the Congress Socialists argued that the February Declaration was not a charter of freedom but a challenge and a call for greater efforts, to maintain national unity. New emphasis must be placed on the socio-economic interests of the masses. In this context the struggles in States acquired new dimensions.

The apprehensions of the Party from this time onwards were centred on the likelihood that power would not be transferred to the 'toiling masses'. On this point a resolution of the Cawnpore convention of the Party (February-March, 1947), the first such convention after the wilderness into which the Party went following the August Movement, observed : "Every care must be taken that power passes not merely into Indian hands but into the hands of toiling masses. It has become the urgent duty of socialists now to create adequate sanctions so that the authority that takes power from British hands is not other than a government of the toiling people of this country."² In this context they criticised the popular governments for neglecting the enactment of solely needed measures of social security, of minimum wage, deflection and control of price line. They also viewed with concern the deterioration of the communal situation in the country. The disturbances, though apparently communal, were the results of the propaganda and activities carried on by anti-national and reactionary elements.

1. *Narain, Obt. Cit.*, p. 218.

2. *Janata*, March 21, 1948.

The waverings of the Party became more marked with the announcement of the Plan of June 3, 1947. The National Executive of the Socialist Party which met on 10th June disapproved of this plan. It was surprised to find that the country had reluctantly accepted the plan. The Executive expressed its disapproval and grief at the proposed partition of the country. Through a series of successive acts the people had slipped into accepting the decision to divide as inevitable and the only way-out. The closing paragraph of its resolution on the subject was very frank and self-searching and provided a clear testimony on the inability of the left-wing movement to master the situation. It said : "Each act of surrender, perhaps not of much import by itself but of great effect as a link in the chain, and the refusal of the Congress leadership to prepare a position and hold on to it have brought us to this fateful situation. The Socialist Party must also record its own failure and that of the wider revolutionary movement in working out an alternative and positive policy."¹ Yet, when the question came before the A.I.C.C. for its approval, Dr. Lohia advised the A.I.C.C. to remain neutral. Really, after declaring their opposition, they abstained from voting under Gandhijee's advice.²

The Communist Party on the Transfer of Power

The attitude of the C.P.I. was not clear in the early stages of the negotiations. It was sometime before the Party shook off its spirit of cooperation with the Government that had been a characteristic feature of its policy since November, 1941. Its general policy was to urge the British Government and more particularly the Labour opinion in Great Britain, to come forward in favour of a declaration of complete independence for India, leaving it to the Indians to choose whatever form of government they liked. The second feature of its general policy was insistence upon the Congress-League unity inside the country.

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1947, Vol. I, p. 259.

2. *P.S.P. : Silver Jubilee Number*, p, 29,

The change of attitude dates from the end of 1945, and the second-half of 1945 and the beginnings of 1946, as we have noted, witnessed tremendous upheavals in the country. As will be shown later, by December, 1945 they had to come out of the Congress, and had to trek out their independent existence. In the meanwhile elections to the legislatures were to take place, in the background of the Simla Conference and the Wavell-Plan, and the rising forms of mass-struggles.

At the A.I.C.C. meeting in September, 1945 the Communists had criticised the Wavell-Plan. Their spokesman Ashraf urged the adoption of the principle of national self-determination. But their criticisms of the Congress and its policies were as yet mild.

However, from December, 1945 onwards, but markedly from 1946, from being almost passive spectators of the scene, the Communists started participating in the movements. The accent now was placed upon the need for a more distinctive anti-imperialist policy. This was expressed in a number of pamphlets like, "For the Final Assault", "For the Final Bid for Power", "The New Imperialist Plan" etc., all of which appeared in 1946. They show that the existing stage was regarded as the final phase of Indian freedom, of which last battles had to be fought unitedly. To the forefront was placed the need to overthrow the British rule and they urged the erection of a new joint-front of the Congress, the League and the Communists for a policy of 'Quit India', all power to people and a C.A. on adult-franchise with proportional representation. They declared that the new British policy was to consolidate the British rule in India through the old strategy of divide and rule. The C.A. would only divert attention of the people from the main struggle.

But in this new phase the Communists concentrated against imperialism and only indulged in mild criticism of the Congress and the League leaderships. The Election Manifesto (1946) held : "The Communist Party concen-

trates all its fire against the imperialist rulers of our common motherland and considers it a crime to waste one word or lose one comrade in internal factional warfare.

“The only call of our Party is : Indian must not fight Indian but all Indians together must fight the British enslavers”.

In this mood they put in the forefront not claims about their own worth, not differences with other parties but the need to overthrow the British rule.¹ The Congress was still regarded as the premier national organization which should be supported, though its Right leadership had to be organised.

The Communists' criticism of the Cabinet Mission-Plan was along the following lines : (i) that it did not make an immediate declaration of independence, (ii) that the indispensable basis for any democratic choice of a constitution, that is the election of a democratic C.A. based on universal suffrage, was denied in the plan, (iii) that no provision was made for democracy in the States, (iv) that it partitioned India into four zones, and no provision was made for ascertaining the wishes of the inhabitants over whom the partition was arbitrarily laid down as an award, (v) that the Central Government was left with very weak and limited powers, (vi) that during the proposed interim period no transfer of power was projected, (vii) that military occupation was to continue during the indefinite interim period and lastly that the C.A. would not be sovereign. They also pointed out that the Plan did not go further than the Cripps' Plan.

In a statement on 4th June, 1947 Joshi regarded it as a desperate imperialist offensive against the freedom movement of the country. It would not mean peace but fratricide immediately.

The Party adopted a more uncompromising attitude towards the Declaration of February, 1947 and the Plan of June 3, 1947. P. C. Joshi, the then General Secretary of the

1. Joshi : *For the Final bid for Power*, p. 53.

Party, in a statement on the February Declaration said : "There is no reason to hail but every reason to be suspicious of Prime Minister Attlee's statement in the House of Commons. It is not a British pledge to quit but an imperialist manoeuvre to gain time."¹

Amidst this attitude of the Party the political resolution of the Central Committee of the C.P.I. held in August, 1946 looked somewhat unusual. It showed left-influence inside the Party. The opening passage of the resolution began : "The Indian freedom movement has entered into its final phase. The mounting mass battles against imperialism herald a period of the struggle for power by the people and the final liquidation of imperialist rule."² Keeping freedom struggle on the agenda they criticised the Congress and the League for pursuing a compromising policy which retarded and disorganised the growth of the revolutionary struggles. They considered each other enemy and in pursuance of the policy of bringing pressure on each other through reliance on imperialism, they roused communal feelings. The two alternatives were that either imperialism would crush the upsurge due to the compromising policy or the Party of the working-people would be able to intervene in the situation effectively so as to lead the people in the final struggle for power.³ But the Party knew that the second was an uphill task for them. However, efforts must be in that direction. Thus the imperialist plan must be exposed. The Interim Government was a government of compromise and surrender to imperialism. The Constituent Assembly was a fake and not a sovereign body. Writing in the Labour Monthly (August, 1946) Dutt held that the British proposals were last of a long series of a constitutional compromise. They demanded full civil liberties, withdrawal of British troops, non-interference of police and military in struggles of the workers, non-suppression of peasant movement etc. They

1. *Indian Annual Register, 1947, Vol. I, News.*
2. *C.P.I. : For the Final Assault, p. 1.*
3. *Opt. Cit., p. 2.*

also urged the joint action of the left. They criticised the C.S.P. and the Forward Bloc for being more anti-Communist and anti-Soviet than anti-imperialist. Communists now started organising and participating in the mass movements more vigorously. Many provincial governments took action against them, and in January, 1947 police made searches of Communist Party offices and allied organizations in Bombay and in other parts of the country. The Communists held the Rightist elements, led by Patel, responsible for these.

But the attitude of the Party towards the Mountbatten Plan was defined by the General Committee of the Party meeting in June, 1947 in a lengthy resolution called "Mountbatten Award and After."¹ It regretted dismemberment of the country. It admitted that the Plan made concessions to nationalism, though it was not a voluntary concession, but that it was far from real independence. The Princes could be used as puppets. It said : "The Mountbatten Award does not give India real independence but is the culmination of a double-faced imperial policy which, while making concession to the national demand to transfer power, sets in motion disruptive and reactionary forces to obstruct the realization of a real independence. The British policy of divide and rule, exploiting Hindu Muslim differences, produced an unprecedented civil-war and now culminated in the final act of partition of the country into two hostile states which they plan to control by entering into new alliances with reactionary forces in the different partition areas."² It was the last desperate step of imperialism. The Resolution further said that the Plan despite its 'desperate move against the freedom movement' provided 'new opportunities' for national advance and that the Dominion Governments and the C.A.'s could be 'strategic weapons' to realize that aim.

The Soviet commentator Zhukov observed that it gave false freedom. Publicist Lemin maintained : "From decla-

1. C.P.I. : *Mountbatten Award and After*.

2. *Ibid.*

rations proclaiming the transfer of power to the Indians it is a far cry for true independence for India. Irrespective of the constitutional changes in India, what really matters is the actual economic, political and military positions that the British capital succeeds in maintaining in that country.”¹

Dutt maintained that despite drawbacks, the settlement of 1947 undoubtedly represented a historic landmark in India’s advance to freedom, though he also maintained that it was no magnanimous voluntary gift by imperialism but a conscious political manoeuvre extorted and dictated by the conditions of crisis.²

The C.P.I. called for vigilance against compromisers in the national movement, but regarded the Congress as the main national organization. It offered its full cooperation with the national leadership in the proud task of building the Indian Republic on democratic foundation, thus paving the way to Indian unity. But it demanded withdrawal of British troops and urged for the development of an independent, democratic foreign policy, with no entanglements in military alliances. Internally it urged abolition of landlordism, nationalisation of key-industries, and control over British capital.³

Other Left-Groups and the Transfer of Power

The attitude of other Left-Groups and Parties towards problems of transfer of power need not be analysed here in detail since, in general, it was one of opposition to any negotiated settlement and on particular issues these groups occupied positions analogous to the stands taken by either the Congress Socialists or the Communists. The Working Committee of the A.I. Forward Bloc, for example, meeting at Jabbalpore in February, 1946 came out against any compromise with imperialism and against accepting office. It reminded its followers that the Bloc had been consistently

1. Quoted in Dutt : *India Today*, p. 561.
2. Dutt : *India Today and Tomorrow*, p. 268.
3. *Mountbatten Award and After*.

against compromise with imperialism. It wanted the Quit India spirit to be developed and carried further. It called for organization of Azad Hind Dal with a pledge similar to that administered to the I.N.A. Ruikar criticised the Congress leaders for side-tracking the question of struggle, but he was also of the view that the left alone was not in a position to initiate a movement. At its prolonged meeting in Calcutta in March, 1947, the Bloc stated that the declaration by Prime Minister Attlee of February, 1947 was "a well-designed and serious attempt at disrupting India in the name of bogus transfer of power."¹ It opposed partition. Of the National Congress it said : "This Committee is painfully aware that frightened by the revolutionary upsurge of the people, the Indian vested interests are entering into a junior partnership with British Imperialism."² It called for a revolutionary struggle under the slogan of seizure of power through a relentless struggle of the toiling people themselves, under the slogan of 'All power to the Indian people'. It called for a joint-front of all patriotic forces. Similarly the Bloc was opposed to the June 3rd Plan especially with its provision for division of the country.

The Bolshevik Party of India, as a champion of struggle, supported the mass movements of 1945-47. It emphasized a violent, revolutionary, uncompromising struggle, under the leadership of the working-class against imperialism. It regarded the Muslim League as a communal organization, and vehemently opposed partition. It opposed the 1947 plan of transfer of power, regarding it not as real independence but only as a transfer of power from the foreign bourgeoisie to the national bourgeoisie.

The Revolutionary Socialist Party of India also emphasized a violent, anti-imperialist revolution to make reality of freedom. It was also opposed to the partition of the country and held that the transfer of power was brought about by a 'backdoor deal between the treacherous

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1947, Vol. I, p. 197.

2. *Ibid.*

bourgeois leadership of the Congress and imperialism'. However, the transfer of power was a reality and the Party resolved to continue 'the half-baked, truncated and unfinished revolution' along the line of anti-imperialist class-struggle and socialist revolution.

The Revolutionary Communist Party of India held that Post-War India was on the verge of a revolution, but the Congress and the League leaderships on the one hand, and the so-called leftists like 'the Stalinist C.P.I.' and the 'Hindusthan' Congress Socialists and the 'confused' Forward Blocists frittered away the energy of the revolutionary masses.¹ It held that the compromising policy of the Congress helped the Muslim League. Had the Congress given a call for a direct action, Jinnah's hands would have been tied. Pakistan was a betrayal, being no solution to the problem. It gave imperialism a foothold on the Indian subcontinent.

In line with its 'revolutionism' the Party criticised the Interim Government and the C.A. and held that the Government should not be settled down to work. Towards the end of 1946 Tagore came forward with his slogan 'The Hour has struck', by which he meant that the moment was opportune for a revolution. Early in 1947 Tagore addressed a letter to all the leftists in the country to summon a People's C.A., through the united strength of all the left-forces in the country, in order to challenge the 'fake C.A. staged by the Indian bourgeoisie'. He criticised other leftists for not responding positively to this call.

The transfer of power was the result of a 'political conspiracy hatched by British Imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie'. It resolved not to allow the government of the vested interests to settle down.

Communalism, Pakistan and the Left

In considering the origin and growth of the Left-Wing movements and ideas so far we deliberately ignored any

1. Tagore : *The Hour has struck*.

detailed consideration of the attitudes of the different left-wing groups towards problems of communalism but from this it should by no means be inferred either that the communal question was a sudden innovation of the post-war politics in India or that the left-groups did not define their attitudes on the problem before this period.¹ In fact, from the time when the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement in the early twenties was followed by serious communal riots, the communist groups, the only left-groups of that period, deplored the outbursts of frenzy, and emphasized the identity of the material interests of the masses. The Manifesto of the C.P.I. (1925) urged the Hindu and Muslim masses not to fall into the traps of vested interests and to unite for the social, economic and political emancipation of the country. It declared itself in favour of a federated India with full democratic rights for the minorities.² The constitution of a free India framed by the Indian left-nationalist groups in exile at Kabul, and referred to earlier, similarly adopted the standpoint of guaranteeing rights to the national minorities, in the manner of the U.S.S.R. The Workers' and Peasants' Party of India (1927-31) also accepted the principles of a federated constitution with full cultural and religious rights to the minorities, emphasizing the material interests of the toiling masses.

The left-wing inside the National Congress that arose under the leadership of Nehru from 1927 onwards, likewise, had a definite opinion on the communal problem. This group regarded the communal problem not as a real problem but as an artificial creation of the British Government and of those upper middle class politicians who had their eyes more on seats in the legislature than on the social, economic and political rights of the toiling masses. In a

1. For an account of origin and growth of communal problem see A. R. Desai : *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* Chapter on Problems of National Minorities; Mehta and Patwardhan : *Communal triangle in India*; K. B. Krishna : *The Problem of Minorities*.
2. *Manifesto of the C.P.I. (1925)*.

hard-hitting critical essay written in 1933, entitled 'Reality and Myth', Nehru very brilliantly showed that the unity of the Hindu and Muslim masses corresponded to the social and political reality, and all else was a myth.¹ Consistent with this reasoning, and to some extent arising from it, was the request of the left-nationalists that the Congress should incorporate the basic economic demands of the masses within its programme. Such a policy, they believed, would be adequate to guarantee that both the Hindu and Muslim masses would stand side by side under the banner of the Congress. They regarded the Muslim League as a reactionary communal organization fostered by imperialism to weaken the nationalist movement, as symbolised by the National Congress. Nehru maintained that the Congress alone, as the sole national organization in the country, had the right to speak on behalf of both the Hindu and the Muslim masses. He also thought that the relative backwardness of the Muslim masses was being exploited by the Muslim League and that the Congress should counter this move by raising the slogans embodying the basic demands of the masses.

This, in a compressed form, was the attitude of all left-nationalists and the other left-groups, including the Communists, on the communal question right up to the Second World War. Time, however, had been working a change in the situation, for the Muslim League, while it remained fundamentally a communal organization, was nevertheless becoming a mass organization, drawing in its fold vocal Muslim intelligentsia, and to a lesser extent the peasantry. The acts of omission and commission by the National Congress after the formation of the Congress Ministries in 1937, only hastened this process. By 1940, at its Lahore session, the League came forward with a demand for Pakistan, that is a separate homeland for the Indian Muslims. With this concrete demand, the communal problem ceased to be a general question, and became specific in its purpose

1. J. Nehru : *Whiter India*.

and direction. In the negotiations for transfer of power that subsequently took place it proved to be a great stumbling block for national unity and ultimately culminated in the partition of the country into two States. We shall now deal with the attitudes that the various left-groups adopted towards the problems posed by the demand for Pakistan.

The Congress Socialist Party, Pakistan and National Unity

Following the lead given by Jawaharlal Nehru the Congress Socialist Party defined its attitude on the communal problem at the very first session of the Party held in Bombay in October, 1934, and adopted a resolution which read : "This Conference is of the opinion that all attempts so far to solve the communal problem, including those made by the Congress and the position taken by the Congress Working Committee on the question, have on wholly false basis of recognition of rights belonging to religious groups and is of opinion that the problem can effectively be liquidated only by the struggle for the economic emancipation of the masses."¹ Subsequent years would find the C.S.P. vacillating on a variety of subjects, but on the subject of communalism, it moved from the fundamental view contained in this resolution at its very first national conference.

The first serious attempt to formulate the view-point of the Party on the specific issues posed by the demand for Pakistan was made by the two top-leaders of the Party, Ashok Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan in a book, the 'Communal Triangle in India', which was written in jail in 1941 and was published in July, 1942. According to the authors the communal question in India had a triangular aspect, and the three parties to it, that is the Hindus, Muslims and British had each got definite responsibilities to bear in giving the problem its existing shape. The British Government was, however, seen as the prime mover in the creation of the communal problem, and to understand its

1. *Report of the First Conference of the C.S.P., 1934.*

motive, one had only to refer to the familiar tactic in their policy—namely that of divide and rule.¹ In opposing the demands for Pakistan, Mehta and Patwardhan said : “We find the extreme demands of Pakistan, to be fraught with incalculable mischief. They open a perspective of hate and fear that will end in disintegration of India and an intensification of her political and social malaise.”² The definite arguments against Pakistan that they advanced were : (i) Pakistan, far from solving the problem of communal tension, would only further complicate Hindu-Muslim relations, (ii) it would create new difficulties for Muslims and would worsen their status, (iii) even where the Muslims were in a majority the autonomy so far enjoyed would probably be sacrificed in favour of a strong central authority, while in the minority provinces the positions of the Muslims would be worse, (iv) the solution of exchange of population suggested by some was impossible as it would affect nearly two-thirds of the population, and (v) the two proposed areas were interdependent in economic matters, and the division into two separate States, could only be of harm to both. Pakistan without mutual transfer of population was no solution of the communal problem.

In indicating a solution of the problem they rejected both the concept of two-nations on which the demand for Pakistan was based, and that of the uni-national state on which the demand of the Hindu communalism was based. The great characteristic of the Indian culture was unity in diversity and, therefore, India could not be a nation in the narrow European sense. A broadly-based Indian nationalism was called for which must respect the integrity of every tradition within the country. A broad and tolerant conception of national unity could be the basis on which a federal constitution could be constructed, incorporating the essential Fundamental Rights, guaranteeing the freedom and integrity of all cultural and religious groups.³

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 223.

2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 211.

3. *Opt. Cit.*, Chapter X.

They also urged the Hindus and Muslims to realize that the supreme need was the freedom of the country, and that neither by themselves could achieve the freedom they desired. The need, therefore, was to take part in a common struggle; it was only by "suffering commonly borne and victories jointly achieved" that new links binding Hindus and Muslims together would be forged. These political considerations would help eliminate the British arm of the triangle.

Their insistence upon a common struggle first, and solution of differences later on, became a cardinal feature of the Party's outlook in the post-war years. They were in favour of a campaign for national unity essentially to rouse the people to struggle for their economic betterment. The Party also believed that so long as the British were there, the communal problem could not be solved¹ In this it came nearer to the view of Gandhi who believed that the British should leave India to work out its own fate, as he was confident that given such favourable conditions, both Hindus and Muslims would be able to resolve their differences. The Congress Socialists regarded the Muslim League as a communal reactionary organization as distinct from the Congress which was a secular nationalist organization, whose treatment of the problems of minorities had always been liberal and sympathetic. They, therefore, regarded the slogan of the Congress-League Unity as a 'snare and a delusion'.² The slogan should be Hindu-Muslim unity. "Without identity of outlook and objectives", said Narendra Dev, "such a unity will be either short-lived or will only end in strengthening the reactionary forces in the country". However, they were not opposed to a joint action with the League on specific issues on which an agreement was possible, and they even urged the League to fight for freedom first.

1. *Address of Narain at Cawnpore Convention, February-March, 1947, in Janata.*
2. *N. Dev : Opt, Cit., p. 158.*

It was in this spirit of opposition to Pakistan that the Congress Socialists opposed acceptance by the Congress of June 3 Plan. The National Executive of the Party in a resolution characterised it as "an abject surrender to the forces of reactionary communalism", and reiterated its faith in the unity of India. It ended : "The division of the country can at no stage be final and must never be accepted as such. The first essential in the fight for a United Republic of India is never to surrender in mind to the idea of division and its application. No matter what temporary arrangements may have to be accepted our people are one and our mind shall never get its seal in this break-up."¹

With this faith in the unity of the country, the Party urged that all forces favourable to the development of a national unity should be encouraged and brought together, with the aim of developing common policies for both States. In India particularly it advocated that ban should be placed on all communal organizations, and that full democratic rights should be conferred on all Muslims. The Congress Socialists believed that the union of the two States which it favoured, should be a voluntary association and would depend very much for its success upon the extent to which the socialist forces—both in India and Pakistan—could be strengthened.

The Communist Party, Pakistan and National Unity

It has been explained earlier that prior to World-War Two the Communist Party, in common with the rest of the left-nationalists in India, regarded India as a single nation and decried the clamours of the League. Though the Party resolution at Mantanvaripallam (1938), reiterated in the Party letter of 1941, put forward the Congress-League Unity as the key to national unity yet, right up to the first-half of 1942, it laid the main emphasis in exposing the reactionary character of the Pakistan programme. In a pamphlet, entitled *The Imperialist Alternative*, written after the Cripps' proposal, Adhikari maintained that the problem

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1947, Vol. I, p. 259.

was not unity vrs. partition; it was the problem of achieving Hindu-Muslim unity. For this a proper solution was needed. In a pamphlet written in February, 1942, P. C. Joshi, the Secretary of the Party, said: "Mr. Jinnah's dreamland of Pakistan (separate Muslim State) leads nowhere except to stalemate and sitting tight."¹ But at a meeting held in September, 1942, the C.P.I. took a very important decision which became a turning point in its attitude towards Pakistan and National Unity. At this meeting G. M. Adhikari introduced a resolution on Pakistan and National Unity which later became known as the Adhikari thesis² and which was also accepted by the First Congress of the Party held in May-June, 1943. In his report Adhikari made an attempt to apply what he called the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist teachings on nationalism towards an evaluation of the Hindu-Muslim problem in India. He emphasized the fact that a nation is a historical product of bourgeois development and evolution. In course of this development in India, various nationalities had come to life and, therefore, a correct solution of the communal problem could not be found unless it was realized that it was in its democratic essence, a problem of rising nationalities.³

The Adhikari-thesis declared that viewed as such, the problem of nationalities could only be solved in a firm and lasting manner under socialism, but that a partial solution was also possible under capitalism, but only under conditions of complete and full democracy, keeping in view the right of separation and the object of unification.

The solution which the Party offered was embodied in the following resolutions :

(a) Every section of the Indian people which has a contiguous territory as its homeland common historical tradition, common language, culture, psychological make-up and a common economic life would be recognised as a dis-

1. P. C. Joshi : *The Demand for Pakistan*.

2. For full report, see, G. M. Adhikari : *Pakistan and Indian National Unity*.

3. *Opt. Cit.*, pp. 8-12.

tinct nationality with the right to exist as an autonomous State within the free Indian Union of Federation and will have the right to secede from it if it may so desire. This means that the territories which are homelands of such nationalities and which today are split up by the artificial boundaries of the present British provinces and of the so-called 'Indian States' would be reunited and restored to them in free India. Thus free India of tomorrow would be a federation or union of autonomous States of the various nationalities such as Pathans, Western Punjabis (dominantly Muslims), Sikhs, Sindhis, Hindusthanis, Rajasthanis, Gujaratis, Bengalis, Assamese, Biharis, Oriyas, Andhras, Tamils, Karnatakis, Maharashtrians, Keralaites etc.

“(b) If there are interspersed minorities in the new States thus formed their rights regarding their culture, language, education etc., would be guaranteed by Statute and their infringement would be punishable by law.

“(c) All disabilities, privileges and discriminations based on caste, race or community (such as untouchability and allied wrongs) would be abolished by Statute and their infringement would be punishable by law.

“(d) Such a declaration of rights inasmuch as it concedes to every nationality as defined above, and, therefore, to nationalities having Muslim faith, the right of autonomous State existence and of secession, can form the basis for unity between the National Congress and the League. For this would give to the Muslims where they are in an overwhelming majority in a contiguous territory which their homeland, the right to form their autonomous States and even to separate if they so desire Such a declaration concedes the just essence of Pakistan demand and has nothing in common with the separatist theory of dividing India into two nations on the basis of religion.

“(e) But the recognition of the right of separation in this form need not necessarily lead to actual separation. On the other hand, by dispelling the mutual suspicions, it

brings about unity of action today and lays the basis for a greater unity in the free India of tomorrow.”¹

Though in this resolution the C.P.I. took a position which rejected any claim of nationalities on the basis of religion, and sharply distinguished its solution from that of the League’s communal demand for Pakistan, yet in the two years that followed the party, in its zeal for Congress-League Unity in practice took a position that was hardly distinguishable from the programme of Pakistan. This became evident in the second revised edition (1944) of Adhikari’s book as well as in another book, ‘A case for Congress-League Unity’ by Sajjad Zaheer that appeared in 1944. The latter said : “The demand for Muslim self-determination or Pakistan is a just, progressive and national demand”.² The Communists even went to the extent of asserting that the League was as much a National, progressive body of the Muslims as the National Congress of India as a whole.

This non-Marxian conception of basing nationalities on religion alone drew a sharp rebuke from R. P. Dutt who, in a lengthy article in the Labour Monthly (March, 1946), criticised the stand taken by the Indian Communists. The main lines of his criticisms were : (i) that Pakistan programme made no mention of the varied nationalities recognised by the Communists, it was a programme of a Muslim State, as opposed to the programme of national self-determination, (ii) that Pakistan was not a federation of recognised national movements of nationalities but a movement of Muslim League for institution of a Muslim State, with the determining factor as religion, not nationality, (iii) that it was not correct to speak of ‘Muslim Nationalities’ any more than to speak of Spain, Italy, etc. as ‘Catholic Nationalities’, to admit such would be playing into the hands of Pan-Islamism, (iv) the Muslim League was not a national movement of certain nationalities occupying certain parts

1. *Opt. Cit.*, pp. 15-16.

2. *Forward, Opt. Cit.*

of India, but a communal organization, organising Muslims as Muslims in all parts of India. He felt that the tactical reasons for this sympathetic approach to Pakistan among the Muslim masses was understandable but there was also danger of the misinterpretation of this position as support to Pakistan. This would be strengthened by the communist act of coming out of the Congress but remaining inside the League. This would eliminate them from the masses.

This had a decided effect on the reorientation of the attitude of the Party towards Pakistan and the League, and it reverted in April-May, 1946 to the line enunciated in the Adhikari-thesis. The new tone was already in evidence in the Election Manifesto of the Party when India was regarded as a family of free nations. It was reiterated in the Memorandum that the Party submitted to the Cabinet Mission in 1946. The Party suggested the redemarcation of the Provinces into 17 linguistic and cultural National Units. Each Unit would have the unfettered right to self-determination by which was meant the right to decide freely whether it would join the Indian Union, or form itself into a separate sovereign State. They were Baluchistan, Fathan land, Sind, Western Punjab, Central Punjab, Hindusthan, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnatak, Andhra, Kerala, Tamilnad, Orissa, Bengal, Assam, Bihar. For this purpose it suggested 17 Constituent Assemblies for each of these Units. The election to these Assemblies was to be based on the recognition of the above stated fundamental right, and during the elections the different political parties should put the question of separation or union to the people. The delegates to the All-India Constituent Assembly were to be elected by the 17 National Sovereign C.A.'s elected on universal adult franchise and it was up to the delegates from each National Unit to decide by a majority vote whether they would join the All-India C.A. to form an Indian Union, or remain out and form a separate sovereign State.¹

1. *Election Manifesto of the C.P.I., 1946.*

But while conceding this right of separation it said : "The best interests of the Indian masses will be served by their remaining together in one common union in a common brotherhood to defend the freedom and solve the problems of poverty which require the cooperation of all."¹ Indeed, at this stage the party came out strongly against what they regarded as any disruptionist tendency, and criticised the League for its reactionary outlook on this score.²

Dutt was later to write : "The partition of India into the Dominions of the Indian Union and Pakistan was, therefore, in no sense a step forward of national liberation or national self-determination. Both States represented, in fact, a compromise of the national bourgeois leadership, in one case, of the Congress, and in other, of the Muslim League, with imperialism. The device of partition served to weaken and divide the democratic movement in India, to exacerbate communal antagonism throughout both Dominions, and to encourage mutual antagonism between the two governments formed. Its blood-stained harvest was revealed in the murderous riots and massacres which followed the act of partition."³

It was one of the reasons why the Party criticised the Mountbatten Plan for dismemberment of India. Like the Congress Socialist Party, it now also professed its faith in the Unity of India and the Indian people, describing the country as a family of nations and expressed the hope that in not distant future the two States would be reunited on a voluntary basis.⁴

The Forward Bloc also was opposed to the creation of Pakistan and the partition of the country, though it declared itself in favour of the right of self-determination and full protection of the rights of religious and cultural minorities. The resolution of the All-India Conference of the

1. *Ibid.*

2. C.P.I. : *For Final Assault.*

3. Dutt : *India Today and Tomorrow*, p. 243.

4. C.P.I. : *Mountbatten Award and After.*

Bloc, held in March, 1947 said: "While this Committee believes that the right of self-determination must be granted to cultural and linguistic units in a socialist society under the Union of Socialist Republic of India it is definitely opposed to the disruption of India on religious and communal basis."¹ The Bloc also opposed the partition of the Punjab and Bengal under the June 3 Plan.

The Radical Democratic Party's approach to the communal problem in general and to the specific issue of Pakistan was partly determined by the assumptions of the Party that the fundamental division in the country was not between Hindus and Muslims but between the 'Haves' and 'Have-nots'. The attitude of the Party on these issues was elaborated in detail by Philip Spratt, a convict in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, while giving his presidential address to the Annual Conference of the Party in December, 1946.² Spratt maintained that the League's demand for a separate State was in fact a demand of the upper strata of Muslims, and that it would lead to an impoverishment of the Muslim masses. He regarded communalism itself as a special form of fascism. The suggestion of the R.D.P. was that the main parties should each draw up a fairly full draft constitution and submit them before the public for their consideration and approval.

The R.D.P.'s main resolution on the subject said: "In order to solve the communal problem and prevent it from being further aggravated, the Hindu and Muslim masses must be rescued from the reactionary and revivalist influence of these upper class parties."³ For this a campaign for modernisation of Indian society should be launched immediately. Regarding the constitution itself, it suggested a constitution founded on the principles of radical economic reconstruction which would end exploitation and create a free and progressive society. It must contain provisions for protection of the

1. *Indian Annual Register, 1947, Vol. I, p. 197.*

2. *For detail see, The Other India, January, 1947.*

3. *Ibid.*

rights of minorities and to secure for them a proportionate share of power. For this purpose the R.D.P. suggested the continuance of separate electorates.¹ It also suggested the redivision of the provinces on a cultural and linguistic basis, and it was also in favour of granting these units the right to secede from the Indian Union on the sanction of a provincial referendum.

The State of the Left-Groups

This account of the left-wing movements would be incomplete without an assessment of their position at the close of the period we have been studying, and we shall now turn to it.

The Congress Socialist Party

As a result of the active participation of the Party in the August Movement (1942) all the leaders and most of the rank and file workers of the Party were in jail at the close of the War, and the Party itself had been declared illegal. Many prominent Congress Socialists remained in jail even after the release of the majority of Congressmen, and the latest to be released was Jai Prakash Narain, the outstanding leader of the party, who was released on the eve of the arrival of the Cabinet Mission in Spring, 1946. It was only then that the ban the Party was removed.

Although a few leaders of the Party who had been released earlier, kept alive the spirit of the Party, the post-war activity of the Party in any real sense of the term started only from the summer of 1946 when the ban on the Party was removed.² At the very outset the two urgent problems of organization and ideology confronted the Congress Socialists. Though the Party had gained great popularity and enhanced its prestige in the eyes of the people by its heroic deeds and sacrifices in the August Movement, yet this increase in the influence of the Party was not matched by the organizational strength of the Party. On the contrary, the Party had not yet recovered from the

1. Election Manifesto of the R.D.P., 1946.

2. The first meeting of the National Executive of the Party could only be held in September, 1946.

serious losses it suffered when the Communists were expelled from its fold in 1940 and had taken intact the Provincial branches in the South.¹ Meanwhile the hold of the Party in the trade unions and in the Kisan Sabhas had been considerably weakened, to the same extent that the Communists had gained. At the same time various sorts of people had entered the Party in the wake of its new popularity and the Party had grown into an inchoate and rather an uneven movement. The Congress Socialists, therefore, had to recognise their Party in all respects all over the country. They had also to redefine their attitude towards the National Congress.

At the time when this question of reorganization of the Party arose in 1946, three trends developed inside the Party. The group which was predominantly nationalist advocated the view that there was no need of a Party separate from the Congress and that the Party should not be reorganised as a Party. This group held that the old Party should not be revived and that the old and the new should function as a left-wing of the Congress as a tightly organised socialist caucus and make an effort to convert it to a programme of struggle and socialism. This trend was represented by Kamaladebi, Achyut Patwardhan and a group of Bombay socialists led by Purushottam Tricumdass. Mohan Lal Gautam and Nabakrishna Chaudhary supported this view. The other group, consisting of the August, 1942, elements, and headed by Aruna Asaf Ali and R. M. Lohia emphasized the revolutionary role of the Party and advocated the view that an Auguster's Party based upon the experiences of the August movement should be organised. A third section headed by Narendra Dev advocated the view that the Party should be reorganised and vigorously pushed. In the beginning Narain held that they should work as a ginger group inside the Congress and organise a Socialist Party outside but he soon adopted the third view. This third view found general acceptance,

1. Last Chapter.

though the advocates of the second view acquired influence and had a voice in shaping the Party.

The controversy was symptomatic of the state of the Party in 1946, and naturally there were differences as to whether it should be organised within the Congress as a Party or as a loose-group. At the Augusters' Conference in Bombay during the summer of 1946 the continuance of the .S.P. was favoured. This also found acceptance by the National Executive meeting after the Augusters' Conference, though the meeting showed wide divergence of opinion. There were several informal meetings at which important decisions on the Party's role and its relationship with the Congress were taken.

Along with this question of the desirability or otherwise of organising the Party there also arose the question of its relationship to the National Congress. This was necessitated by the fact that the new emphasis of the Congress Socialists, since August, 1942, on a revolutionary and if necessary, violent course of action, was in opposition to the Congress creed and to its current policy of compromise with the British Government. Despite these differences of approach between the Congress Socialists and the Congress no immediate rupture between the two took place. The reason from the viewpoint of the Congress was that though the Rightists led by Vallabhbhai Patel wanted the Congress Socialists to leave the National Congress or to dissolve their Party and work as ordinary Congressmen, yet both Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were opposed to this drastic step and were in favour of continuing the status quo. In 1945 when Nehru became President of the Congress, he invited Lohia to be the Secretary, and some other members to serve on the Working Committee. But they refused because of differences over the question of transfer of power. During the summer of 1946 a series of meetings took place between Gandhi and the prominent Congress Socialist leaders like Narain, Lohia and Dev with a view to evolving a programme on which both the Congress and

the Congress-Socialists could agree. But no agreement could be arrived at.¹

The Congress Socialists, on their part, while criticising the Congress for giving up the policy of struggle and preparation for a struggle and for pursuing a policy of compromise and constitutionalism, thought that a struggle with imperialism was inevitable and that it would be suicidal to the cause of the national freedom in the country if the Congress Socialists were to leave the Congress and form a parallel organization.² They still stuck to their old programme of moving the entire Congress into action and thus emphasized the unity of the Congress. Thus, writing in *Janata*, J. P. Narain said : "If the possibility of an open conflict with the British were not before us, if the possibility of the Congress being driven willy nilly into this conflict were not present, if also, it were not true that a national struggle could be launched in the near future only under the auspices of the Congress I would not have hesitated to advise the Socialist Movement to part company with the Congress."³

The relationship between the two bodies, despite strains and frictions, thus continued to adhere generally to the status quo. Meanwhile, the Congress Socialists, in many parts of the country, gave leadership to the struggles of the workers and peasants then taking place. In this they inevitably came into conflict with the Congress Ministries in the Provinces, and the inevitable increase of tension between the two was reflected both in Provincial Congress Committees and in the All-India Congress Committee.

This was nowhere more in evidence than in the trade union field. Both the Right elements within the Congress as well as the Congress Socialists wanted to dislodge the Communists from the prominent positions they had come to occupy in the vacuum of the post-August period but the Rightist Congressmen were also suspicious of the Congress

1. *Janata*, March 21, 1948, *A History of the Socialist Party*.
2. J. P. Narain : *Third letter to fighters for freedom*.
3. *Janata*, 26th January, 1947.

Socialists. Though both elements were working side by side in the trade union field, particularly in Bombay and Ahmedabad, but a cold war developed largely due to the considerations of power-politics in the country as a whole. The Rightists tightened their control over the existing Majur Mahajan in Ahmedabad and over the trade unions they controlled elsewhere. This process acquired intensity after their failure to dislodge the communists from their position at the Calcutta session of the A.I.T.U.C. in February, 1947. Simultaneously they organised the Hindusthan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh. In May, 1947 they also inaugurated the Indian National Trade Union Congress. The Congress Socialists did not favour the idea. Ashok Mehta maintained that first the Sangh and then the I.N.T.U.C. were instruments forged by the Congress to dominate the labour movement.¹ Moreover, it was done in an undemocratic manner. The Majur Mahajan of Ahmedabad had already been bureaucratised; no elections had taken place for years and naturally the Congress Socialists could not find an access to it.² The Congress Socialists also argued that the I.N.T.U.C. was not formed by the elected representatives of the trade unions coming together. It was an organization formed from the top by a caucus of prominent Congressmen.

Immediately after the formation of the I.N.T.U.C., the Congress Socialists demanded democratisation of the Hindusthan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh but it was rejected. When the question of affiliation arose in the Bombay Rastriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh, the Socialists desired it to be decided democratically and not through any directive from the H.M.S. Sangh but it was ruled out. This led to their resignations along with the workers they controlled. They formed the Mill Mazdoor Sabha, and thus started the process of their parting of ways in the trade union field.

But if this did not lead to their parting of ways with the Congress, this was, among other things, due to the grow-

1. Ashok Mehta : *We accuse the I.N.T.U.C.*, p. 3.

2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 2.

ing influence of Gandhi over a number of prominent Congress-Socialists.

It was in this atmosphere that the first post-War Conference of the Party, the fifth in Party's history, met at Cawnpore in March, 1947. This Conference took some momentous decisions which laid the basis of the new structure and ideology of the Party. It restated and redefined its fundamental objectives. On the organizational plane, it adopted a new draft constitution which deleted the word 'Congress' from the name of the Party and opened its membership to non-Congressmen. The ordinary or associate membership of sympathisers was discontinued and a new all-India body of the Party, that is, the General Council was introduced. The General Council was to consist of 100 members elected by the Provincial branches. While general policies of the Party were still left to be decided by the Annual Conference, the General Council was empowered to formulate policies in the interval or in case the Annual Conference did not take place due to some reasons.¹

The dropping of the word 'Congress' was not an expression of hostility to the Congress, though in the light of the subsequent events, it might be interpreted as such. But it did mean the loosening of the bond between the Congress and the Congress Socialists and it might be regarded as indicative of the parting of the ways that followed later in 1948. This step was necessitated by the fact that with their new approval towards struggle and revolutions the Congress Socialists could no longer work in the name of the 'Congress' without coming into conflict with its creed. These changes, however, did not preclude them from working inside the Congress whose constitution was very tolerant on this point. This measure was also, necessitated by the fact that the Congress Socialists were now putting more emphasis on the social and economic interests of the masses and this measure indicated the shift of the accent from 'Congress' to Socialism. Thus writing editorially on the

1. *Indian Annual Register*, 1947, Vol. I, p. 189.

decision to drop the word 'Congress', Janata observed : "A new generation of Socialists has to be reared up away from enervating unrealities of parliamentary politics, to complete the task of nationalism. The Indian Socialist must retain his assertive nationalist outlook and fight the vestige of foreign influence wherever they are seeking a foothold".¹

The ideological reorientation that the conference brought about, was the more important of the changes affecting both the conception of Socialism held by the Party, and its view as to the method by which it should be achieved. A draft statement of policy embodying decisions in these directions was approved by the Conference. The policy as revised was later adopted by the General Council of the Party which met in August, 1947. Entitled 'Policy Statement', it represented the basic policy of the Party.

The Policy Statement declared democratic socialism as the goal of the Party and held that there could be no socialism without democracy. It distinguished between 'democratic socialism' and 'totalitarian socialism' and declared that the latter was not socialism. While the new goal, on the one hand, involved the abandonment of Marxian socialism by which the Party had so far stood, on the other it involved the adoption of the goal generally taken by the Social Democratic Parties of the West, though the Party did not as yet openly admit this. Its leaders still maintained that they were being true to Marx. Speaking at the Conference Narain said that Democratic Socialism was fully in consonance with Marxism. The new thesis itself spoke of the fundamentals of the Party embodied in the Meerut and Faizpur Theses as being still intact.² One reason for this lay in the fact that there was a large body of opinion among the rank and file workers who refused to believe that there can be any other type of socialism than Marxian socialism. The leaders, therefore, retained their formal adherence to Marxism and argued that it were

1. *Janata, 7th March, 1947.*

2. *Socialist Party of India : Policy Statement, 1947, Chapter I.*

the 'totalitarian communists' who had given up the essence of Marxism. On the other hand, they still fought shy of identifying themselves with the Social Democracy of the West for the reason that the Western Social Democracy failed during the inter-war years and also failed the cause of Indian independence. The thesis stated that the Socialist Party adhered to the path of revolution.¹ The picture of Socialism that the Policy Statement gave was as follows: "It is a democratic society where everyone is a worker and all men are equal, including women; where there are equal opportunities for all and wages do not differ so much as to create distinctions of class; where all wealth is owned by community; where progress is planned; where labour is joyful and fruitful; where life is richer, fuller and more beautiful."²

Claiming itself to be a revolutionary Socialist Party, the Party went on to indicate the methods that it thought were essential for the realisation of socialism. The Statement declared that in theory state power can be captured by either of the two methods, i.e., by an insurrectionary overthrow of the State or by democratic means. But which of these two would be applied in a particular country could not be decided upon a priori assumptions but depended upon conditions present in that country. While not ruling out the possibility of the violent overthrow of the existing state, it declared its preference for democratic methods and said: "The Party believes that where democracy and civil liberties are in existence, the transition to socialism must be peaceful and through democratic means."³ It, therefore, maintained that in India and Pakistan the course towards socialism "shall be determined by the success or failure of the efforts" to create democratic institutions. If these efforts were successful, the transition to socialism could be accomplished through normal processes of democracy.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Programme of the Socialist Party, 1947.*

The Statement also distinguished democratic means from mere constitutional or parliamentary means. Civil resistance, Satyagraha, strike (in certain circumstances) are not constitutional means but they are democratic means. The Party expressed its desire to adopt all these methods if and when occasions demanded. In international sphere the Party showed its preference for a World Government and peace, and a bloc of neutral, non-aligned nations. A distinctive feature of the Party during this period was its cooling down of enthusiasm for left-unity. In his third letter to the Fighters for freedom, Jai Prakash Narain maintained that he had no faith in left-unity which was an impossibility.

The Communist Party

The Communist Party of India started its post-war activity in a peculiar situation. On the one hand its opposition to the August Movement (1942) alienated the sympathy of the nationalist elements in the country. The ordinary people, who could not understand the involved principles of internationalism on which the Party had advocated cooperation in the War, and upon which it opposed the Movement, took these as acts of betrayal of the national interests, and regarded the Communists as collaborators with imperialism. Naturally, at the end of the War the stock of the Party was low in the eyes of the people. There were a number of demonstrations against the Party in different places and in Bombay the Party's central office was even burnt down.

While this was the general attitude of the nationalist-minded people, the Communist Party itself had made considerable strides during the War. This was demonstrated not only in the rapid rise in the membership of the Party which increased from 8,000 in 1942 to 30,000 in 1946, but also in the increase of its hold both in the A.I.T.U.C. and in the All-India Kisan Sabha (Peasants Organization), in both of which the Communists acquired a pre-eminent position.

These two statements might seem to involve contradiction but in fact it is not so. Firstly, the stronger hold in the trade unions had been acquired in the absence of other rival left trade-unionists who at that period were in jail. Evidence of this can be easily seen. In spite of the increased influence in the new trade unions, there was simultaneous loss of the control of the Bombay unions, for example, which had taken many years to build. The workers in these places could not understand why the same Communists who throughout in the past had always been in the forefront of workers' struggles, were now giving the slogan of 'no-strike' even though economic situation was worsening. Secondly, it has to be remembered that for the first time in its history the Communist Party worked legally and increase in membership can thus be accounted for by this favourable change in the situation.

When the Indian Communists started their post-war activity, two trends became discernible. One was represented by B. T. Ranadive, the fiery orthodox Marxist from Bombay, who advocated a complete reversal of the war-time policy of restraining the struggles of workers and peasants. The other trend was represented by P. C. Joshi, (the then Secretary of the Party and perhaps one of the best organisers the Party ever had), who advocated the continuance of the old policy, though in a different form, keeping in view the changed circumstances in the country. Right up to July, 1946 the latter view ultimately prevailed. In the second-half of 1946, as already noted, it appeared as if the first view had gained ascendancy. But from 1947 the second view again prevailed and continued up to August, 1947. Evidently the Communists were moving cautiously.

At this stage the question of the relationship of the Communists with the National Congress also arose. Both the Rightist elements inside the Congress and the Leftists represented by the Congress Socialists and the Forward Blocists were clamouring for the expulsion of all Communists from the National Congress for their 'treachery' in the August Movement. Indeed after Mahatma Gandhi's

release in 1944 the question had persistently posed itself. A series of letters passed between Mahatma Gandhi and P. C. Joshi. In one of these Gandhi had asked Joshi to explain the following points : Meaning of 'people' in the People's War, finances of the C.P.I., activities of the C.P.I. against the August Movement, policy of infiltrating the Congress with a hostile intent, and the dictation of the policy of the Communist Party from outside.¹ In the correspondence that followed Joshi gave lengthy explanation which somewhat allayed the fears of Gandhi but his apprehensions regarding the Party remained. Joshi held that the people in the slogan People's War meant the peoples the world over without exception. The funds of the Party came from the masses, and it was loyal to the national organization. Its policy was based upon the Marxist-Leninist principles of internationalism and there was no question of dictation. Joshi suggested examination of charges by persons like Bhulabhai Desai. Early in 1945 Gandhi appointed Bhulabhai Desai, the then Leader of the Congress Party in the Central Legislature, to inquire into the charges against the Communists. The findings of Desai virtually amounted to the exoneration of the Communists of all charges, except the charge that the Communists advocated the slogan of Peoples' War and worked against the August Movement. But the cry against the Communists was maintained with strength and the Working Committee in September, 1945 appointed a Sub-Committee consisting of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Gobind Ballabh Pant to further enquire into the charges. In their report they pointed out that many of the charges were vague and irrelevant. They also did not get themselves involved in the issue whether it was a peoples' war or not. In recommending to the A.I.C.C. whatever actions it deemed necessary to take against the Communists they pointed out that the Communists' policy from 1942 onwards was opposed to the Congress policy and as such the Communists

1. *Correspondence between Mahatma Gandhi and P. C. Joshi*, p. 2.

had indulged in acts of indiscipline.¹ The Communist attitude to Pakistan, Muslim League, Gandhism, August movement etc were directly opposed to the Congress. They suggested that the Communist members of the A.I.C.C. be asked to explain their conduct in terms of discipline in the Congress. This report was made public in October, 1945. The Communists were charge-sheeted and they sent their explanation. But immediately thereafter the Communists, without waiting for the action of the A.I.C.C., directed all their members except those who were members of the A.I.C.C., to leave the Congress. In their reply to the charges these Communist members of the A.I.C.C., knowing that on some points raised they were on assailable grounds, raised the wider issue of socialism and internationalism and asked the A.I.C.C. to judge their behaviour on the following :—“Did our policy aim at the achievement of freedom for our country or did it take the country away from it? Did we serve or betray the daily interests of our people in the pursuit of our policy.² They further argued that for a leadership to identify criticism of its policy with hostility to the national movement or even to the organization as such was not desirable. In their lengthy reply they even criticised the Congress for many acts of omission and commission in the past. They argued that they did not let down the Congress in as much as a movement was never started by the Congress, and that the national leaders themselves had condemned acts of violence.

The A.I.C.C. at its meeting held in Calcut'a in December, 1945 removed all Communist members of the A.I.C.C. from all elective bodies in the Congress. Prominent among those were : Sardesai, Chitale, Bhagwat, Ashraf, Zaheer, Sohan Singh Josh, Karyanand Sharma and Bharadwaj. It directed Provincial Committees to take similar action. Joshi

1. P. C. Joshi : *Communist Reply to the Congress Working Committee Charges.*
2. *Communists' Reply to Congress W. C. Charges*, by P. C. Joshi, Vol. I, p. 19; For other material on the subject from Communist standpoint see, *Gandhi-Joshi Correspondence*, P. C. Joshi : *Congress and Communists.*

in a statement said that this was a logical conclusion to the double-faced strategy of diplomatic bargaining with the British and demagogic speech-making with the people. He held that the Communist movement stood on independent grounds. Thereafter the Communists acted as a force independent of the Congress. During the elections to the Legislature early in 1946 they contested 108 seats to the Provincial Legislatures, but not a single seat to the Central Legislature. The Election Manifesto of the Party demanded immediate freedom. It contained the following : (i) Abolition of landlordism, nationalisation of land, redistribution of land etc., (ii) nationalisation of all key-industries, control of all major industries. (iii) Abolition of the Usury system and provision for all agricultural credit through Cooperative State Banks. (iv) People's State. (v) Planned development. (vi) A ban on private trade in people's food; a People's State to ensure direct purchase from the peasants at fair prices. It also contained items of immediate relief to the workers and peasants.¹ It called for a united struggle for complete independence. It held out the principle of self-determination for all nationalities, and said that power should be transferred to the C.A. It was a final struggle for Indian freedom. The vote of the Communists was the third largest in the country and they secured nine seats to the different provincial legislatures and polled nearly 7,00,000 votes.

The Radical Democratic Party

Among the other left-groups the Radical Democratic Party of M. N. Roy also fought the 1946 elections on its own programme. Its Election Manifesto contained items like abolition of Zamindari and of big landed estates, reduction of rents and taxes so that they might not exceed 15% of the gross produce, cancellation of indebtedness of the peasantry and provision for credit facilities, common ownership of heavy industries and mechanical transport and of all the

1. *Election Manifesto of Communist Party of India, 1946.*

natural reserves like mines and forests.¹ But the Party failed to win a single seat, which speaks of its lack of popular support, and showed it up to be a party of leaders without a following. On the eve of the elections Roy had wild expectations. He held that the future of his party and of India would depend on the result of the elections. After the elections he maintained that it was a typically fascist election and was neither free nor fair.²

The dismal failure at the elections undoubtedly hastened the process of thinking which led to new Humanism and Radicalism and eventually to the dissolution of the R.D.P. itself in December, 1948. Though the new idea could be discerned in a germinal form in Roy's thinking as early as in 1939, yet 1945-47 definitely marked a period of transition of the new phase of thinking. It emerged in an erect form as a result of discussions at the Political Study Camp at Dehradun in May, 1946 and at a conference of the Radical Democratic Party held at Bombay in December, 1946. Roy continued to be critical of Gandhism and of orthodox nationalism but he also felt the inadequacy of both capitalism and communism. Capitalism had for long proved its bankruptcy. Communism also had falsified all hopes. Internationally the two systems constituted themselves into blocs which threatened peace in the world.³

Roy urged the necessity of scientific politics and undogmatic thought which would value rationalism and freedom above everything else. This attitude necessitated, he felt, not only a deviation from Marxism but also its revision. But Roy did not as yet totally reject Marxism. But one must look beyond Communism.

Roy still sometimes thought of revolution and of a party of revolution but now he thought this might not be a mass party, but a brain-trust of revolution.⁴ Neither the

1. *Fos detail see Election Manifesto of Radical Democratic Party, 1946.*

2. *M. N. Roy : New Orientation, p. 48.*

3. *Roy : Memoirs, p. 600.*

4. *Roy : Problems of Indian Revolution, p. 4.*

rank and file, nor the masses could serve the country. The R.C.P. stood for Enlightenment, for a philosophical revolution to provide moral and spiritual incentive to the great social upheavals which would set the Indian people free.¹ It aimed at creating a group of individuals who would approximate to the ideal of 'Plato's philosopher-kings.'² He felt that even the leftist-revolutionary parties in India, with their core of anti-imperialism, would become 'unemployed' after Imperialism had gone voluntarily and a revolution of a kind had taken place by consent, of which there were already signs.³

The Forward Bloc

The Forward Bloc also was reorganising itself. Like the Congress Socialist Party, the stock of this Party, too, was high in the eyes of the people, especially after the news of the deeds of Subhas Chandra Bose, its founder, became known. The I.N.A. trials gave a further fillip to the increase in the prestige of the Party. As we indicated in the last chapter, organizationally speaking the Bloc was not homogeneous. This was further revealed in the first post-war meeting of the Working Committee and leaders of the Bloc in February, 1946, under the Presidentship of R. S. Ruikar. Most of its leaders still believed that Bose would soon come to lead the country and the Bloc to a successful revolution. The Bloc took a serious note of the 'growing totalitarian tendency, among the Congress High Command, to hamper the democratic functioning of political parties within the Congress'. It was desirable that parties and groups based on a definite political ideology and programme should be allowed to work within the Congress. However, unlike its past, the Bloc showed no militancy on this score and merely resolved to place the grievances before the Congress Working Committee.⁴

1. Roy : *New Orientation*, p. 9.

2. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 217.

3. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 173.

4. *The present political situation and the duty of the Forward Bloc workers*, pp. b-c.

The meeting resolved to keep the name Bloc. It unanimously adopted the following objective of the Bloc: "The Forward Bloc is a Socialist Party accepting the theory of class-struggle with its fullest implications and a revolutionary programme of mass-action for the final attainment of socialism, leading to a classless society."¹ For this purpose it emphasized work among the workers, kisans, students and youth.

The Party held an important conference in the middle of March, 1947. It reiterated the earlier stand. The question of adoption of an immediate programme came before the Conference. The leaders of the Bloc showed themselves divided as to what their great leader stood for. The division veered round the Marxists and the non-Marxists. But they ultimately agreed that Bose stood for a Socialist India, and adopted the following programme: 1. To mobilise the people under Netajee's slogan of "All power to the Indian people"; 2. To form panchayat in every village and factory; 3. To achieve leadership of the day-to-day political and economic struggles of the workers and peasantry; 4. To build a People's Volunteer Organization; 5. To assume active leadership of States People's Struggle; 6. To build invincible National Unity etc.²

CONCLUSION :

The years between 1945 and 1947 were the years of negotiations for transfer of power to India. All the left-groups were opposed to the way in which power was being transferred. The fact that they could not decisively influence the course of events was a measure of their weaknesses, as it was also demonstrative of disunity that prevailed among them. It is curious that the slogan of left-unity was, by and large, absent during the period. It was this Left which embarked upon its new phase of movement in independent India.

1. *Opt. Cit.*, p. 1.

2. *Indian Annual Register, 1947, Vol. I, pp. 186-98.*

CHAPTER TEN

Conclusion

Our thesis has been that the different Left-wing movements in India first arose out of and against the background of the nationalist movement and of imperialism, their aim being to evolve ways and means of making that movement more effective. They pointed out flaws in the approach of the National Congress and maintained that so long as the Congress did not remove them, the National movement could never be successful. They urged the adoption by the National movement of a comprehensive programme of democratic freedom, embracing the immediate basic demands of the "toiling masses" in India, and capable of rallying them together under the banner of the national movement. For this purpose each of them evolved appropriate platforms of action. But these platforms were not socialist programmes; neither were they meant to depict a picture of a socialist India; they were—in Leftist vocabulary—programmes for carrying out the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution. They differed, however, from the characteristic programmes of this type in a number of respects. Firstly, they differed because they were advanced by socialists; they indicated a socialist approach to such problems and therefore, they inevitably bore the stamp of the socialist ideology. Secondly, they were based on the contention that the national bourgeoisie could no longer play the part of leader of the national movement and, therefore, to the socialists unity of the national movement meant unity of the "toiling masses" of India, excluding the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes like the princes and the landlords. In their programmes they, thus, gave prominence to the common demands of the working masses. A third, and perhaps the most important, reason was that they did not draw a Chinese wall between

the national revolution and the social revolution. All of them firmly held that the achievement of freedom should not culminate in the establishment of a capitalist democracy in India. National freedom to them meant social, economic and political emancipation of the people of India. They were convinced that only the adoption of the revolutionary method of national struggle that they advocated could end in transfer of power to the common people. It was for this reason that they felt uneasy at the way power was being transferred in 1947.

A characteristic feature of the Left-wing movements in India during the period is the remarkable sense of socialistic internationalism which they displayed. Their uncompromising opposition to British Imperialism and British capitalism might lead an unsympathetic critic to assume that they were fanatic nationalists. This is definitely not so. If they opposed British capitalism, they no less opposed Indian capitalism. They all believed in the essential friendship of the British and the Indian peoples, as of all peoples of the world, but according to them a real and abiding friendship could not be established unless capitalism was destroyed in both these countries. Abolition of imperialistic domination was the first step in this direction.

A further distinguishing feature of these Left-wing movements during the period under review is that they all declared Marxian socialism in general to be their basic philosophy, though in case of the Congress Socialists the process of rethinking had already begun. They stuck to this faith with an almost childlike simplicity and they took the principles of Marxism and the ultimate traditional values of socialism so much for granted, that no real attempt was made to establish the case for socialism. They took it almost as axiomatic that socialism was the only goal for India. It was only when they were confronted with the criticism of the Right, or were faced with the apathy of some Congressmen, that they, as socialists, thought it necessary to argue the case for Socialism. Jai Prakash Narain's "Why Socialism?" is a case in point. Even the differences

among the various Left-groups at this stage were not so much on the ultimate goal of socialism as on the tactics to be applied to the national movement in general and to the National Congress in particular. It was thus that the constitutions of all of them declared the twin goals of complete independence and socialism. The personnel of the Left-wing groups and parties was in almost all cases active participant in the nationalist movement.

Being more outspokenly anti-imperialist, these Left-wingers had to court imprisonment and bear other reprisals more often than other Congressmen. This, coupled with the fact that they were constantly called upon to evolve new tactics and new programmes to cope with the new problems that often faced the national movement, partly accounts for the lack of academic discussion on the problems of socialism. Yet, while it would be wrong to give the impression that they neglected opportunities to develop their socialistic outlook, it has to be stressed that these opportunities were distinctively limited, and it is to the solving of problems in practice, that we must look, to see this outlook in its development.

A contribution of the Left groups was their emphasis on a secular, rational and scientific outlook. In a country like India where religion and traditional moral values bordering on dogmatism and fanatic superstition, play so predominant a part, this was an uphill task. The Left-wing elements in India generally moved very cautiously in this matter because not only had they to keep in view the susceptibilities of the nationalist cause they were trying to secure, but also they had to guard against the criticism of the Right which was always eager to rouse the passion of the people on these issues, vis-a-vis its confrontation with the Left. The Left-wingers did not, therefore, come forward with any slogan or crusade against religious and traditional values, although some of them in their writings criticised religion, traditional moral values, caste, untouchability, the Hindu cult of asceticism, renunciation, etc. The various writings of M. N. Roy of the period abound in such

critical notes. Late Rahul Sankrityayan also struck such a note. But both the Congress socialists and the communists moved very cautiously in these matters. This is understandable, considering that they regarded these social evils like caste, untouchability etc as largely socio-economic in origin and thought that unless structural-institutional changes were brought about these evils could not be eradicated. To indulge in mere propaganda against them was to become Utopian. This, for example, was their criticism against Mahatma Gandhi's approach to these problems.

Closely connected with this attitude, and following from their socialist world outlook, was their attitude towards the communal problem that besmirched the face of India, and was ultimately to result in the partition of the country. We have indicated in detail the final solutions that the various Left-groups offered to this problem and we need not repeat them. What, however, needs to be emphasised again is that right up to the end all of them regarded the communal problem not as a problem intrinsic to India but as an artificial growth with definite historic roots. The rise of the communal problem is connected with the specific features of developments in the modern Indian history, especially the development of the Indian Nation.

A nation is a historic category and it evolves in course of socio-economic and political developments. Indian nationalism grew under the conditions of foreign conquest and colonial rule. It was British capitalism which laid the basis of capitalist development in the Indian economy but since this was motivated by the interests of foreign capitalism this development remained incomplete and even distorted. The national states that came into being in European countries almost abolished all feudal remnants in the social and economic life of their nations. But the British Government in India perpetuated feudal relics and generally supported the conservative forces as a social support to its rule. Thus it happened that the national consolidation of the Indian people did not reach the level attained by the English or the French people.

The Left-wingers argued that the British Government in India also followed a policy of political counterpoise. During the early phases of the British rule, because power had been captured from the Muslim rulers, a policy of favouring the Hindus and keeping a suspect eye on the Muslims was pursued. It thus so happened that Hindus rose to prominence in every walk of life, while the Muslims remained backward. The origin of the Aligarh movement under the inspiring leadership of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan during the last decades of the last century marked the genesis of political awakening among the Muslims. But this was canalized into incorrect communal channels for a number of reasons. The upper elements of the Muslim community consisting of the landlords and sections of bourgeoisie and the professional classes found the Hindus already entrenched in key positions in trade, industry and finance.¹ They needed the support of the masses of their community in their struggle with the Hindu rivals : they, therefore, tried to give this growing national and class awakening of the Muslim masses a deformed communal form, to secure their support. In this way the upper strata developed communal problems to serve their own sectional interests and at the same time prevented united mass movement of the poor strata of all communities against the vested interests. From the first decade of the present century the situation became further complicated. Inside the Indian National Congress there grew up the extremist school which based itself on Hindu revivalism. This made the Muslims suspect that Hindus were seeking to re-establish Hindu rule. The British Government also now changed its political strategy and with the rise in the tone of nationalism of the Indian National Congress it started pitting the Muslims against the Hindus. The Communal electorate embodied in the Morley-Minto Reforms was the beginning of a process to divide the Indian nation on religious grounds. Meanwhile the mass political awakening of

1. A. R. Desai : *Growth of Indian Nationalist Movement and Thought.*

the Hindu and Muslim masses began to grow. The Non-co-operation Movement under the Gandhian leadership was a united movement of the Hindus and Muslims but this unity was not based on the economic interests of the masses but on the religious issue of Khilafat and it was not surprising that this unity soon broke down. From then onwards the leadership of both the National Congress and the Muslim League failed in their duty to rejuvenate the national movement on the socio-economic demands of the masses. On the contrary, they busied themselves with parliamentarianism, with the scramble for seats in the Councils, in which struggle neither the Hindus nor the Muslim masses were the least concerned. All the Left-wing movements emphasized the futile character of this approach. They categorically pointed out that constitutionalism was not only not the way to freedom, but it would even further accentuate the communal problem. They persistently argued the adoption of a programme embracing the real interests of the masses of the Indian people. But the leadership of the National Congress failed in this respect.

The leadership of the National Congress particularly failed in 1937 when having come to power in seven provinces it had the unique opportunity of embarking upon comprehensive measures of social and economic reforms which could have brought the Muslim masses under the banner of the Congress and thus alienated the League. This specific line of criticism was advanced by all Left-groups. To this, the Communists added another criticism, namely, the failure of the Congress leadership to form joint Ministries with the League in the Provinces like Assam, Bengal, Punjab etc. Some Left-elements also criticised the failure of the U.P. Congress in accommodating Liaquat Ali Khan and Kaliquzamman in the Ministry. It has been pointed that this was a turning point in Muslim politics. This gave Jinnah an opportunity to rouse the Muslim masses against the Congress. Events followed with quick strides and Pakistan became a reality.

Another problem on which the attitudes of the left-wing had to be stated was the peasantry and the agrarian problem. Since India is a predominantly agricultural country, any advance in a socialist direction is organically bound up with the solution of the agrarian problems. Secondly, in view of the fact that all the Left-groups in India during this period were professing faith in Marxism, which is fundamentally a proletarian socialism, it is desirable to take note of the ways in which they tried to deal with the peasant problem. The issue is further complicated by the fact that no uniform system of land tenure exists in India and the problems of the Zamindari and Talukdari areas were to a great extent different from those of the Ryotwari areas. A further complicating factor is the penetration of the capitalist form of exploitation in land in Indian villages. And lastly, account has to be taken of the fact that peasantry is not a homogeneous class and the interests of one section of it often come in conflict with another. All the Left-groups had, therefore, to enter into the task of evolving a programme which could embrace the common demands of all the exploited classes.

In formulating their agrarian programme, which were almost identical, the Left groups were careful to point out that these were not full socialist programmes and that the solutions they were offering were evolved with a view not only to enlisting the support of the peasant masses in the nationalist cause but also taking them step by step on road to socialism. Here arose an antagonism of attitude inside the All-India Kisan Sabha (Peasants' Organization), between the socialist and communist elements on the one hand and the nationalists like Ranga on the other, over the question of the adoption of the Kisan Mazdoor Raj (Peasants' and Workers' Rule) as the ideal of the peasant movement. This ideal was all along opposed by the socialists and the communists as they did not want to commit themselves to an ideal antagonistic to socialism. Indeed the difficulties of reconciling the concept of Kisan Mazdoor Raj with that of socialism are considerable. The latter speaks

of a collective society in which the ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange are socially owned and the ultimate stage of socialism precludes all remnants of private property whether in land or in other means of production. The conception of Kisan Mazdoor Raj, on the contrary, is democratically (in a liberal sense) conceived and behind the vague ideal of the Kisan Mazdoor Raj is the hard core of the retention of peasant proprietorship in land. It is not surprising that the socialists and communists did not agree to this proposal for long.

In the agrarian field the primary aim of the Left-wing elements was to put forward a programme which would, when implemented, end the exploitation of the peasant masses and make them owners of land. In the Zamindari and the Taluqdari areas, therefore, they demanded the abolition of the Zamindari system (landlordism) without compensation. In both Zamindari and Ryotwari areas they demanded redistribution of land but they were careful to point out that to begin with the redistribution of land should not affect the rich peasants but only the landed estates. The other immediate measures that they suggested were liquidation of all debts owed by peasants and workers, liquidation of arrears of rent, complete exemption from rents and taxes of all peasants with uneconomic holdings, reduction of rent and revenues by at least 50%, irrigation facilities and credit facilities through State Cooperative Banks. They also urged the modernisation of agriculture through introduction of scientific technology. This programme was common to all Left-elements, the only exception being the communists when both in 1930-31 programme and in the Election Manifesto of 1946 they came forward with demands for nationalisation of land and confiscation of all lands belonging to the landlords, the churches as well as large tracts of land belonging to the Britishers and other foreigners.

The measures enumerated above would result in peasant proprietorship in land. The next step was to encourage cooperative and collective farmings. But they

insisted that this was to be a voluntary affair and to bring this about a great campaign of propaganda and education among the peasant masses was necessary. It was particularly necessary to see that they were not allowed to develop a spirit of peasantism and were gradually given understanding of a socialist economy.

A socialist in an industrially backward country is often faced with the problem whether socialist undertakings can be ventured upon at that stage of economic development. But the industrial backwardness of the country did not discourage the Left-wing elements in India. The socialist experiments in the Asiatic regions of the Soviet Russia which from the point of view of industrial development started from a position even more backward than India, only emboldened them in this respect. They firmly believed that if a socialist party were in power, with the requisite sanction behind it, it could build up socialism anywhere in the world with the help of modern science. It was realised that this could not be accomplished in one stroke but a beginning must and could be made. For this it was essential that measures for rapid industrialisation of the country should be undertaken. It was from this standpoint, therefore, that the Gandhian crusade against industrialization was criticised. Socialism could only be established in an atmosphere of plenty but Gandhism aimed at rationing poverty rather than at increasing the standard of life of the people. But the industrialization of the country should not take place under the aegis of capitalism. Therefore, changes must be brought about in those spheres of large scale production which were of key importance in the economic life of the country, and industries like steel, cotton, jute, railways, shipping, plantations, mines etc. must be socialised. Side by side with the socialization of these means of production the socialisation of the means of distribution and exchange also must be brought about. But the development of the non-socialized sector of the economy was not to be left uncontrolled. The State must have control over them and they must be carried on on the basis of coopera-

tives for production, distribution and credit purposes. Indeed the development of the economic life of the country was to be planned and controlled by the State. For this it was also necessary that the State should have the monopoly of foreign trade. The general policy under such a state would be not only to gradually socialize the non-socialized sector of the economy but to bring agriculture also in the socialist sector. A society which aimed at establishing a classless society and eliminating all private profit motives could not retain agriculture in private hands.

A common criticism against socialism and socialist planned economy is that under it the individual is not free and loses his sense of initiative. The socialists argued that this was more true of capitalism than of planned life under socialism where the chaotic uncontrolled laws of capitalist economy are converted into purposive and determined ends, and the individual takes part in that process through his factory, farm or cooperative.

A noteworthy feature of the Left-wing elements in India was that all of them demanded the recognition of the right to work in any constitution of Swaraj India, which, of course, they hoped, would be a socialist state. They also realised that the ultimate state of the socialist society was a state in which the working of the principle, 'to everyone according to his need and from everyone according to his capacity', would be possible. But till that stage was reached it was necessary to have money and wages and some differences in income.

We see that the various left-wing movements in India during the period we have been examining agreed largely with the tenets of Marxian socialism and they did not at this stage contribute anything 'Indian' to the treasury of Socialism, though the Congress Socialists had already started the process of imbibing elements from Gandhism.

The Left-wing movements, neither singly nor collectively, exerted a decisive influence on the course of the national movement in India. An outstanding reason was the very diversity of outlook between the Left groups

themselves. The very number alone of the Left groups is an evidence of a general weakness that afflicted the Left-wing movements. Indeed one could liken the fragmentary state of the Left in India to the political scene presented in countries such as France, which are by-words for the multiplicity of separate parties that exist. Organizationally weak, numerically deficient, financially crippled, a disunited Left proved itself incapable of giving a leftist turn to events. Their being helpless and pathetic spectators to the events in 1947 and after is a measure of their incapability and inability. And yet, it has to be admitted that the adoption by the Congress of the goal of complete independence, the Karachi Congress resolution on Fundamental Rights and Economic Policy, the progressive election manifesto (1937), no less than the militant tones of the Congress when occasions demanded (as in 1942), were, in no small measure, due to the presence of the Left, and to the mass movements and organizations that they fathered.

A notable feature of the Left is their attitude to 'bourgeois' sex-ethics. The Indian leftists did not, generally speaking, subscribe in theory to the orthodox Marxist attitude on the subject; nor did they adopt it in practice. Here the Indian outlook and traditions were too strong to be repudiated.

Though most left-wingers, during this period, professed, in varying degrees, their allegiance to Marxian socialism, but curiously enough, the proletarian elements among them were but handful in number; the overwhelming number being educated middle-class. This was as much true of the communists as of others. What, however, distinguished them from others was the total absence of elements from vested interests in their organisations. Moreover, as compared to the Congress their members were young. The Leftists believed in the revolutionary overthrow of imperialism, by which they almost invariably meant a violent overthrow.

Among the communists we note a consciousness of their dependence on Russia, financially and intellectually during

this period. Dange even told the author that there was nothing morally wrong in taking such help. 'Who does not take such help?' he asked. Also to be noted is the role of the British Communist Party in spreading communism in the Colonies and its championing, like the Soviet Union, of the cause of Indian national independence. While speaking of the financial aid, it has to be noted that upto 1935 such help came not only from the Soviet Union but also from the British Labour Party, British Trade Union Congress etc. and it was extended not only to the communists but also to the left nationalists and trade unionists. An intelligence report prepared by the Government of India for the period from 1922 to 1929 illustrates the point.

With the achievement of independence in 1947 an assumption of the communists and some other leftists that national struggle can be successful only under the leadership (at least hegemony) of the proletariat, received a rude blow. One of the grounds for the weakness of the Communist and other Marxist splinter Left parties was their plan of working both legally and illegally. They deliberately loved conspiracy and conspirational methods and showed apriori disdain of 'bourgeois' methods.

Indeed in respect of the Left as a whole one wonders whether a more non-doctrinaire, a more realistic, pragmatic and circumspect attitude in regard to the anti-imperialistic struggle in the country, which was certainly without precedence elsewhere, would not have been more appropriate to the situation.

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INDEX

- Abolition Period, 12.
 Acharya, Trimul, 94, 97, 161.
 Adhikari, J. M., 174, 175, 236.
 Agrarian Programme, 85.
 Ahmad, Muzaffar, 58, 60, 64, 97, 98,
 99, 100, 121, 133, 165, 166, 168-69,
 178, 189, 227, 231, 237, 238, 272.
 Ahmad, R., 105-107.
 Ahmad, Qutubuddin, 180-81.
 Ahmedabad Congress, 41, 103.
 Akali Movement, 116.
 Ali, Muhammad, 77, 98, 100, 168.
 All-India Congress Committee,
 191, 284-85.
 All-India League, 297.
 All-Bengal Tenants' Conference,
 180.
 All-India Independence League,
 294
 All-India Kisan Congress, 386-89,
 391-94, 442-43.
 All-India Socialist Youth League,
 294-95, 297.
 All-India Trade Union Congress,
 42-47, 49-50, 54-59, 99, 101, 104,
 113, 129-32, 134, 197, 198-99, 203,
 205, 235, 237, 276, 386, 402,
 405-10.
 All-India Volunteer Corps, 294.
 All-India Youth Congress, 295.
 All-India Youth League, 294.
 Allison, George, 122.
 All-India Working Class Party,
 Jabbalpore, 306-7.
 Anand Math, 69.
 Ansari, 234.
 Anushilan Society, 21.
 Ancient Scientific Socialism, 365-
 67.
 Anti-Imperialist Front, 386.
 Arnot, Page, 193, 302.
 Ashleigh, Charles, 116.
 August Movement, 517-19.
 Aurobindo, 69.
 Ayengar, Srinivas, 169.
 Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, 99,
 103
 Bagerhatta, 154, 159, 163.
 Bakhale, R. R., 44, 46.
 Banerjee, S. N., 237.
 Baptista, Joseph, 48-49, 52, 56.
 Barkatullah, 90.
 Bardoli, 134-38.
 Basak, Gopal Chandra, 297.
 Bangiya Krishak-o-Shramik Dal
 181.
 Bela Kun, 88.
 Bengal Peasants' and Workers'
 Party, 163, 171.
 Bengalee, S. S., 9-10.
 Besant, Annie, 26, 27, 47-48.
 Bhakna, Sohan Singh, 23.
 Bharadwaj, R. D., 465.
 Bhatt, K. C., 28.
 Bihar Socialist Party, 312.
 Bolc, S. R., 13.
 Bolshevism, 51, 59, 63, 166.
 Bolshevik Party, 150, 471-73, 525-27
 Bolshevik Conspiracy Case, 119-20.
 Bolshevik-Leninist Party, 528-30.
 Bombay Millhands' Association, 13.
 Bombay Socialist Party, 305, 311.
 Bose, S. C., 111, 239, 283, 291-92,
 294-95, 443-44, 450.
 Borodin, M., 71.
 Boycott Movement, 293.
 Bradley, Benjamin Francis, 133,
 224, 227, 237, 238, 420-22.
 Brahma Samaj, 18.
 Brailsford, G. H., 302.
 Brelvi, S. A. 47.
 British Labour Party, 26, 33, 44,
 47-48, 50, 51, 56, 58, 129, 132, 197
 200, 205-7.
 British Labour Movement, 43, 45-
 46, 108.
 Calcutta Seamen's Union, 13.
 Calcutta Committee of the C.P.I.,
 242.
 Cama, Madame, 29, 94.
 Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy
 Case, 118, 155, 207, 232.
 Central Intelligence Bureau, 59.
 Central Asiatic Bureau of the C.I.
 at Tashkent, 88.
 Central Legislative Assembly, 134,
 299.
 Cerrar, 135.
 Chettiar, S., 58, 149, 100.

- Chamanlal, Dewan, 47, 50, 129, 207, 208.
- Chattohadhyaya, V., 93, 168, 240, 252, 282.
- Chattohadhyaya, Kamala Devi, 305, 338.
- Chatterjee, B. C., 69.
- Chauri Chaura, 30, 109.
- Chartism, 67.
- Civil Disobedience Movement, 138, 141-42, 233, 248, 251, 285, 305, 307, 321.
- Cole, G. D. H., 26, 303.
- Colonial Thesis, 212.
- Communist Party of India, 69, 78, 97, 98, 100-05, 121, 144, 155-56, 158, 162, 166, 169, 171-75, 178, 194, 211, 231, 235, 236, 238-39, 243-44, 273-74, 276-78, 308-9, 495-96, 546-50, 559-62, 574-77.
- Communist International, 93, 97, 98, 129, 153, 161-62, 167-68, 171, 173-76, 194, 215, 226-27, 236, 240, 259-60, 273, 276-77, 419-22.
- Communist Conference, 166-67.
- Communist Manifesto, 99.
- Communism, 230-31, 233, 336-38.
- Cominform, 239-40.
- Congress, Indian National, 18, 21-22, 30, 38, 39, 41, 43, 49, 53, 55-56, 103-4, 112, 132-33, 135-37, 146, 163-64, 201, 204-5, 231, 234, 238, 273-74, 279-81, 284, 290-95, 300, 301, 304, 307, 353-55.
- Congress of the Socialist Youth, 296.
- Congress Socialist Party, 304, 308, 311, 315, 316-325, 328-30, 334, 335, 343, 344-50, 353-60, 380-84, 412, 416-18, 451-52, 502-8, 539-44, 566-68.
- Congress of the Toilers of the East, 107.
- Congress Labour Party, 182.
- Cooperative Quarterly, 19.
- Dange, S. A., 60-64, 98-99, 110, 112, 117-20, 133, 149, 166-67, 169, 206, 220, 223, 227-28, 231, 237, 238, 283.
- Das, C. R., 147-49.
- Decolonisation Theory, 262.
- Despande, S. V., 174, 234, 242, 245.
- Desai, M. G., 127, 221.
- Dev, Narendra, 41, 292, 294, 310, 331, 333, 334, 340, 344, 348-49, 357, 361.
- Limitrov, 419-21.
- Dostoevsky, 98.
- Draft Platform of the C.P.I., 244.
- Drain Theory, 22.
- Dutt, Batukeshwar, 299.
- Dutta, Bhupendra Nath, 15, 23, 72, 93-94, 133, 295.
- Dutta, C.P., 28, 162, 168.
- Dutt, R. C., 22, 138.
- Dutta, R. P., 54, 97, 127, 234, 302, 420-22.
- Faizpur Thesis, 346, 347, 358.
- First All-India Congress Socialist Conference, 311-13, 314.
- Forward Bloc, 463-67, 492-94, 564-66.
- Ganabani, 117, 182.
- Gandhism, 371-75, 505-07.
- Ghadarites, 183.
- Ghate, S. V., 121, 182, 188, 220, 223.
- Giri, V. V., 47, 112.
- Girni Kamgar Union, 128, 403.
- Glading, P. E., 122.
- Goswami, D., 189.
- Gupta, A. C., 181.
- Gupta, N. C., 180.
- Halim, Abdur, 100.
- Hallsworth, J., 235.
- Hardie, K., 19, 26.
- Hardayal, Lal, 23.
- Hijrat Movement, 72, 73.
- Hindusthan Socialist Republican Association, 298.
- Home Rule, 44, 48.
- Home Rule League, 27, 61.
- Horniman, B. G., 184.
- Huq, A. K. Fazlul, 64.
- Hussain, Ghulam, 100, 102.
- Hassan, Shamsuddin, 102.
- Hyndman, 19.
- Indian Labour Movement, 42-43, 48, 112.
- Indian Labour Party, 53-54, 197, 205.
- Indian National Congress, 309-11.
- International Communism, 175, 176.
- International, Second, 24.
- International Labour Conference, 54.
- International Labour Organisation, 46.
- International Socialist Conference, 21.

- International Socialist Movement, 44.
- Islam, Nazrul, 64, 99, 180-82.
- Iyengar, K. S., 160, 166.
- Iyengar, Srinivas, 234.
- Jhabwalla, 167, 223.
- Jinnah, 47.
- Joglekar, K. N., 64, 121, 158, 167, 169, 182, 188, 220, 223, 237.
- Johnstone, 132-33.
- Josh, Sohan Singh, 179, 183, 185, 188-89, 220.
- Joshi, N. M., 44, 46-47, 53, 54, 56, 136, 207, 253.
- Joshi, S. M., 308.
- Joshi, P. C., 175, 453, 466-67, 497.
- Kadam, L. N., 189.
- Kamgar Samachar, 13.
- Kautsky, K., 25.
- Kelkar, N. C., 234.
- Khan, Abdul Razaak, 100.
- Khan, Gowher Rahman, 105.
- Khan, Md. Akbar, 92, 107.
- Khankhoje, 194.
- Khilafat, 39, 64, 163, 164.
- Kitchlew, Dr. S., 234, 282, 287.
- Kirti-Kisan Party, Punjab, 184, 287.
- Kirti, 117, 184.
- Kisan Sabhas, 390-94.
- Kisan-Mazdoor Raj, 397-98.
- Kranti, 124, 126.
- Krantikari, 185.
- Kuusinen, 241.
- Labour and the New Social Order, 57.
- Labour Swaraj Party, 152, 178-80.
- Lahore Conspiracy Case, 23, 299.
- Lal, G. D., 11, 34.
- Langal, 117.
- League of Radical Congressmen, 482-483, 508-9.
- League against Imperialism, 170, 295.
- League for the liberation of the East, 66.
- Left-Consolidation Committee, 408-09.
- Left-Congressmen, 250-51, 333.
- Left-Consolidation, 465.
- Left-Wing, 35, 41, 42, 280, 261, 316, 443-45.
- Leftism, 36, 37, 360, 428-30, 443-44, 485.
- Leftism, 1.
- New Spark, 117.
- Left-unity, 451-52.
- Lenin, V. I., 42, 77-79, 81, 82, 85, Leninism, 172.
- 136, 153, 228, 297.
- Lohia, R. M., 340.
- Lokhande, N. M., 9-14.
- Lotvala, 61, 62, 64, 97.
- Lovestone, Jay, 125.
- Luhani, G. K., 94, 209.
- Malaviya, M. M., 234.
- Mansoor, F., 64, 105, 183, 189.
- Marx, Karl, 142, 297.
- Marxism, 52, 60-64, 100, 109, 172, 176, 289, 295, 331, 336, 337, 380-84.
- Marxist Socialist Party, 322.
- Mazeed, M. A., 105, 183, 189.
- Masani, M. R., 305, 308, 341, 346.
- McDonald, 27, 53.
- Mehta, Ashok, 308, 342, 379-80.
- Meerut Conspiracy Case, 159, 174, 209, 220, 221, 233, 238, 239, 244, 252-53, 275, 278.
- Meherally, Yusuf, 294, 307, 338.
- Mirajkar, S. S., 167, 182, 220-23.
- Moderates, 23, 36.
- Mohani, Maulana Hasrat, 103, 165, 157.
- Moonze, Dr., 234.
- Muhammad, S., 103.
- Mukherjee, Abani, 88, 89, 91, 93, 98, 104, 117, 142.
- Mukherjee, B. N., 189, 224.
- Muncherburg, Willi, 166.
- Nair, J. M., 9, 17.
- Neoroji, Dadabhai, 19, 22.
- Nariman, K. F., 47, 294, 295.
- Narain, J. P., 304, 308, 312, 393, 339, 345, 350, 354, 361, 368-70, 372-74, 377, 449.
- Nare, B. R., 13.
- Naseem, H. A., 105, 209.
- Nationalist Left-Wing, 212.
- Navayug, 64, 117.
- Nawjawan Bharat Sabha, 184, 297, 306.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal, 41, 53, 110, 132-33, 169-70, 192, 234, 239, 264, 280, 282-90, 292, 294-96, 310, 324, 322, 455.
- Nehru, Motilal, 47, 284, 330.
- Nimbkar, R. S., 64, 67, 121, 169, 188, 220, 223, 237.
- Neo-Fabian Society, 56.
- New Platform of Action of the C.P.I., 245.

- Non-Cooperation Movement, 35,
 37, 41, 62-64, 100, 137-38, 206,
 279, 293, 300-302.
 N.T.U.F., 405-10.
 Panikar, K. M., 42.
 Paris Congress, 25, 26.
 Patel, V. B., 39, 47, 136.
 Patwardhan, Achyut, 305, 341.
 Pawar, V. M., 47.
 Peasants' International, 176.
 People's Party, 151.
 Piatskov, 84.
 Punjab Socialist Party, 306.
 People's Front, 418-19.
 Post Gate, 26.
 Potter-Wilson, J. E., 28.
 Prakasam, T., 294.
 Public Safety Bill, 295.
 Purcell, A. A., 235.
 Qutubuddin, Ahmad, 99.
 Rab, Abdul, 89, 90, 97.
 Radical Democratic Party, 522-24, 535-39.
 Radek, 88, 141.
 Rai, Lajpat, 19, 22, 44, 46, 50, 56,
 59, 70, 171, 198-99, 294.
 Raja Mahendra Pratap, 68, 88,
 74-77.
 Rafiq, 89.
 Rao, B. S., 34.
 Raj Guru, 299.
 Ram Rajya, 378-80.
 Ranadive, B. T., 174, 234, 242.
 Ranga, N. G., 302, 303, 395.
 Red Flag, 297.
 Red Trade Union Congress, 405,
 406.
 Revolutionary Communist Party,
 475-77, 528.
 Revolutionary Nationalist Party,
 231.
 Revolutionary Socialist Party,
 473-75.
 Right, 361-66, 449.
 Right-Wing, 430-33, 442.
 Roy, M. N., 51, 52, 53, 69-80, 81-82,
 88-94, 97, 99, 102-04, 109, 113-14,
 117-19, 135-38, 140-44, 147-51,
 153-55, 160-62, 168, 172-75, 178,
 194, 199, 200, 201, 213, 228, 258-67,
 282, 411-15, 454, 508-13.
 Roy Group, 265-67, 411, 508.
 Royal Commission on Indian
 Labour, 17, 32.
 Russian Revolution, 33, 37, 42-44,
 46, 51, 58, 60-63, 98, 100, 101, 108,
 176, 227.
 Ryan, J. F., 132-33, 188.
 Sacco-Vanzetti, 167.
 Sampurnanand, 305, 376.
 Saklatvala, 123, 154, 157, 181, 203-
 04, 228.
 Sankrityayana, Rahul, 304.
 Sarkar, Hemant Kumar, 180-81.
 Satyabhakta, 156, 158-60, 161, 167.
 Satyamurti, 169.
 Saraswati, Sahjanand, 391-92.
 Savarkar, 93.
 Saw, B., 26, 99.
 Scurr, J., 56.
 Shafiq, Md., 80, 90-92, 209.
 Servants of India Society, 19, 53.
 Shah, Masood Ali, 105.
 Shah, Mian Md. Akbar
 Shah, C. G., 228-30.
 Singh, Bhagat, 232, 297-99.
 Sheildrake, K., 28.
 Simon Commission, 207, 208, 238.
 Sipassi, Md. A., 168.
 Sittaramayya, P., 38, 280, 281, 290.
 Sinha, Ganga Sharan, 305.
 Sir George Schuster, 21.
 Shankar, Gauri, 155, 189.
 Singh, Santokh, 121.
 Smedley, A., 54, 94, 96.
 Socialism, 1, 305, 330, 331, 337.
 Socialist International Congress,
 29.
 Socialists of Madras, 57.
 Social Service League, 19, 53.
 Social Democratic Federation, 20.
 Soviet Union, 60, 289-91, 331.
 Spark, 117.
 Spoor, Ben, 44, 198.
 Spratt, P., 122, 130-34, 169-70, 178,
 224, 227, 231, 237-39.
 Sukhdeo, 298-99.
 Sultan-Zade, 82.
 Swadhin Bharat Sangh, 294.
 Swaraj Party, 147-50, 206, 307.
 Swaraj, 38, 39, 164, 170, 292, 297.
 Swaraj Front, 287-88.
 Tagore, S. N., 171, 209, 475-77.
 Talcherkar, N. A., 13.
 Tendulkar, D. G., 38.
 Thengdi, D. R., 124, 199, 223, 237.
 Tilak, B. G., 19, 61, 62, 205.
 Tolstoy, 62, 98.

- Trades Disputes Bill, 295.
 Trade Unionism, 109, 112, 230, 400.
 Tricumdas, P., 311.
 Trusteeship Theory, 374-76.
 Usmani, Shaukat, 105, 209, 221,
 224, 227, 261.
 United Front, 386, 426 .
 Vanguard of Indian Independence,
 117.
 Verma, Krishna, 29.
 Verma, P. P., 304.
 Victorian Liberalism, 18, 42.
 Wadia, B. P., 27, 47-48, 49, 56.
 War Council, 174.
 Webb, Sydney, 19.
 Wedgewood, Col., 44, 56-57.
 Wilconson, Ellen, 302.
 Workers' and Peasants' Party, 123,
 169, 173-76, 178, 193-95, 199, 212,
 218, 219, 221, 243, 278, 295.
 W. & P. P., 166, 169.
 Workers' Welfare League of
 India, 28.
 Young Workers' League, 242.
 Yugantar Group, 23, 70.
 Zakaria, Md., 77, 98.
 Zinoviev, 88, 98, 101, 177.