

DANGE'S "LETTER" -- KEY ISSUE FOR INDIAN CP?

By Kailas Chandra

The split in the Communist party of India [CPI] has come much sooner than expected. It is taking place not over the ideological or political differences that exist between the two major warring factions within the leadership but over something involving the personal integrity of the party's Khrushchevite chairman, S.A.Dange.

The left wing has unearthed from India's national archives (now open to research), a letter purported to have been written by Dange from jail, forty years ago, to the then British Viceroy of India, allegedly offering to work for the British government if he were released.

The year was 1924. Dange, still in his early twenties, had been convicted in the first Cawnpore "Bolshevik Conspiracy" case and sentenced to four years, along with three other Communist leaders -- Muzafar Ahmed, Shaukat Usmani and Nalini Bhushan Gupta.

From the Sitapur District Jail in Uttar Pradesh, Dange allegedly wrote to the Viceroy, promising to use his "exceptionally influential position" among Communists in India and abroad "for the good of your Excellency's Government and Country. . . if I am given the opportunity by your Excellency granting my prayer for release."

Dange is also alleged to have assured the British Viceroy that he had "never been positively disloyal towards His Majesty in my writings or speeches nor do I intend to be so in future."

Leftists in the CPI claim that the letter is genuine. Their testimony appears to have foundation although the circumstances ought to be borne in mind. The young Dange had just become engaged to the girl he was later to marry. Now he faced four years in prison.

But the Central Secretariat of the CPI issued a statement on March 13 -- in the absence of Dange who was away in Moscow -- branding the letter as a "forgery" and even insinuating that the British police might have placed a forged document in the national archives.

The Secretariat also declared that the leftist "sectatians" within the party had circulated this document (which was first published in the Current, a rabidly anti-Communist Bombay weekly) "in league with reactionaries" to discredit the party "leadership."

However, two leaders of the left faction -- M. Basavapunniah and P. Ramamurthi -- challenged the Secretariat's contention that the Dange letter was a forgery and claimed that the handwriting was "authentic." They demanded that Dange should quit his post because of this deed and they threatened to press for his removal from office at the forthcoming meeting of the party's National Council.

Soon other leaders of the left faction all over India, including Muzafar Ahmed (Dange's co-defendant in the Cawnpore case) issued statements echoing the same demand -- "Dange must quit as Chairman."

Dange's Reaction

On returning from Moscow March 28, Dange defended the Secretariat's statement and repeated the charge that the letter was a forgery. He threatened disciplinary action against the leftist leaders who had publicly vilified him after the Secretariat's declaration.

The Secretariat, which met in New Delhi on April 1, called for drastic steps against "splitters and disruptionists," thereby making a split in the party almost a certainty. The Secretariat also accused the leftists of deliberately attempting to "disrupt the Party at the behest of the leadership of the Communist Party of China." Peking had also called for a split in the CPI.

An emergency meeting of the National Council of the CPI was scheduled for April 10 to deal with the "grave inter-party situation."

Obviously the Dange letter is not the basic cause of the present rift. Serious political differences exist between the right and left wings, with the "centrists," headed by E.M.S.Namboodiripad, attempting to play a conciliating role. [See World Outlook January 17.]

Left Wing Document

The left wing has finally begun circulating counter proposals to the position held by the Dangeite leadership. According to a press summary released April 1, "the left wing CPI would like to accept the proposition that it was absolutely essential to replace the 'present bourgeois-landlord state headed by the big bourgeoisie, by a state of peoples' democracy led by the working class' for the fulfillment of the basic tasks of the Indian revolution.

"The left wing would like the objective to be achieved through peaceful means by developing a powerful mass revolutionary movement and by combining 'parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forms' of struggle."

These points, according to newspaper reports, are contained in a rough draft program prepared by three prominent leaders of the left group, M. Basavapunniah, P. Ramamurthi and Harkishan Singh Surjeet.

Copies of the draft have been circulated among "leading members" of the party for discussion and comment on the basis of which a final draft is to be prepared and submitted to the National Council.

The draft, according to its authors, was prepared after consul-

tation with leading members of the "left wing" who are "in violent disagreement with the present leadership on several fundamental ideological, theoretical, political and organisational questions."

For the first time, the left wing has placed a document before the rank and file of the CPI for discussion. Unfortunately its impact is being dissipated because of the big noise over Dange's alleged letter.

Letter Yellowed with Age

The petition claimed to have been written by Dange forty years ago, even if it is found to be genuine, has interest only as an episode in the history of the CPI. Dange might have written such a letter. But not even his enemies would accuse him of having played the role of a British stooge in his subsequent political career.

The record shows that despite his alleged plea, Dange was not shown any particular leniency by the British government. He had to serve his full term with only the normal time off.

The supposed letter did not prevent the British government from arresting him again in 1928 in connection with the famous Meerut case and making him one of the main defendants in a "Communist Conspiracy" to overthrow British rule in India. On this occasion Dange served seven years in jail.

Dange was one of the few young intellectuals (including Muzafar Ahmed, C.G. Shah, etc.) who came of their own volition to the Communist movement in the early twenties. The most convincing explanation for this mysterious letter is that it might have been written by the 22-year-old "conspirator" as a wrongly conceived "tactic" -- a foolish attempt to deceive the British Viceroy and secure his freedom. Perhaps the imperialist proconsul saw through the maneuver and simply filed it.

From a Communist standpoint, it was unethical for a young militant in prison to offer to serve British imperialism, even as an attempted bit of trickery. But then what of the ethics of attempting to convert it into a scandal for factional use forty years later?

Period of Real Collaboration

There was indeed a period when Dange did collaborate with the British rulers of India -- during 1942-45 when the entire CPI, including Dange's present leftist critics, supported the British "War Efforts" while the people throughout the country were engaged in a struggle for freedom from imperialism.

In the light of such a record, it is not surprising that the factional struggle in the CPI is being conducted on such a low per-

sonal level at the expense of crucial ideological clarification and study of the real history of the party.

The Dangeite leadership is loyally carrying out the Khrushchevite line in the world Communist movement by pursuing class-collaboration with the Nehru government. Its policy signifies sabotage of class struggles in India.

The leftists, however, have yet to offer a consistent revolutionary alternative to the revisionist policies of the Dange leadership. At most, the draft program they are now circulating can be considered only the beginning of what is needed.

That the leftists resort to personal attack instead of conducting a serious political discussion is a sign of weakness. They are, in fact, resorting to the old discredited Stalinist practices in fighting their political opponents. Stalin's answer to political opponents was to frame them up. Khrushchev repeated what he learned from his master. In liquidating Beria, he dubbed him a British spy.

Slanders do not educate anyone. They serve only to cloud the issues on which the workers need clarity if they are to successfully accomplish the revolutionary tasks they face. In place of such methods, what is required is a free debate on the issues in which all Marxist tendencies should be invited to participate.

This could play a big role in the preparation of the Indian masses for the coming revolutionary struggles against the present capitalist-landlord system.