

## 2. COMINTERN AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA

As historical experience shows a communist movement arises in a particular country at a certain stage of its socio-economic and political development, as a result of an upsurge in class activity by the working people, and above all the proletariat, as a result of the work of the most class-conscious revolutionaries. That was also the case in India.

The importance of help and guidance from the Comintern for shaping the communist movement in India cannot be assessed without referring to the situation in the country. In 1919 the liberation movement had begun to acquire extensive scope. The British colonial authorities could do nothing to stop it.

The Indian National Congress (INC) was faced with a choice: either to become a mass organisation, not only advocating the national emancipation of India, but also in some way taking account of the economic and social demands of the working people, or to leave the movement of workers and peasants to its own devices. The latter course would have encouraged, no doubt, the emergence and rapid strengthening of political organisations of the working people, the INC's serious competitors. In that event the INC could be deprived of a mass basis. It took the first course. It equipped itself with the

ideology and tactics of Gandhism that was effective in India. Gandhi was not simply a utopian who protested against industrial civilisation. Being a great patriot, he did not link the prospect for Indian liberation with the advantages for a particular class, a particular ethnic group, a particular caste, the adherents to a particular religion. But his social programme reflected in a specific, utopian form the aspirations of the most deprived sections of Indian society, and primarily the oppressed peasantry. The attainment of Indian independence on the basis of Gandhism could lead, of course, to the establishment of the political rule of bourgeois classes rather than of the working people. But Gandhi appealed to all social groups striving for independence. He encouraged the formation of broad sections of the Indian people in the fight against the colonialists. Non-violent forms of struggle were such only in relative terms. Gandhi's tactics consisted in relying on the people and putting the greatest possible and ever-mounting pressure on British imperialism, a pressure which would be exerted without bloody skirmishes (in conditions that prevailed at the time such armed encounters would have given the British upper hand), with priority use of those forms of struggle that corresponded to Indian traditions and specific conditions. The various classes and social groups of Indian society interested in national liberation saw Gandhi as their leader.

In the autumn of 1919, the INC session in Amritsar took a decision to begin organising a labour and trade union movement, as well as boycotting elections to the fictitious "self-governing institutions" envisaged by the 1919 Act (according to that act, entitled by the colonialists an "Indian Constitution", if any bill was proposed or amended so as to affect "the safety or tranquillity of British India or any part thereof", the Governor-General may stop it). The INC foiled the elections.

Gandhi worked out a stage-by-stage programme for conducting a campaign of non-cooperation (*satyagraha*) beginning in August 1920. This form of anti-imperialist movement envisaged various non-violent means of fighting against colonial rule: demonstrations, petitions, meetings, non-payment of taxes, boycott of foreign goods, refusal of Indian civil servants to perform their duties in the colonial state apparatus, etc. *Satyagraha* was by no means then an alternative to national revolution similar to that which occurred in China a few years later. In semi-colonial China militarist groups were at each other's throats. One of them was under the control of left-wing nationalist organisation (within which Communists worked). As a result revolution in

China possessed political leadership and was organised militarily. Nothing of the sort existed in India. The British controlled the situation in India, and individual spontaneous actions by the native population were every time put down by the regular forces and the police.

The INC action as organiser of *satyagraha* helped to convert it into a mass organisation. In late 1921 it had some ten million members. The INC was becoming a party of anti-British forces, although the most influential in it, of course, were national-bourgeois groups. That, however, did not preclude the possibility for those organisations of working people which took shape within the framework of the Congress to fight for political independence.

Workers and peasants in the *satyagraha* period were more and more frequently acting under INC slogans. Without taking part in the campaign of non-cooperation, begun by Gandhi and taken up by the Congress, the worker-peasant movement would possibly not have acquired the mass nature that it did. It also might have not gone for some time beyond common economic demands unconnected with anti-imperialist slogans. Participation in the anti-imperialist movement was an important school of political development for the workers and peasants of India. But, on the other hand, the bourgeois-nationalist leadership restrained the class development of the working people.

After an incident, in which peasants in their despair had attacked a police station and dealt savagely with the police, Gandhi, who felt that such excesses could only harm the movement, stopped the non-cooperation campaign in February 1922. Excitement in the country was running high, but the alternative to Gandhi's decision was apparently not a mass armed action and a victorious revolution, but more likely fierce repression of the popular movement by the colonialists, destruction of the INC and the forces of national liberation. After their retreat, Gandhi's supporters focused attention on the constructive programme which they put forward, proclaiming the need to regenerate in India traditional forms of production (hand spinning and weaving, etc.). The Congress had entered a period of crisis, but Gandhi's appeals enabled the INC to maintain contact with the people.

So, an end to the non-cooperation campaign in February 1922 should not be termed a defeat for Indian revolution for the simple reason that even at its highest point the national liberation movement in India at the beginning of the 1920s had not grown into revolution. But a decline in the mass

struggle was obvious. In 1923 only a few hundred thousand members remained in the Indian National Congress. A group of Swarajists, advocating the use of "self-governing institutions" for anti-colonial struggle took shape and gathered strength. Their prestige was undermined in 1926 by a grave setback at the polls for the "self-governing institutions". The left wing headed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose reinforced its position within the INC; it called on supporters to step up work among the people, suggested more widely applying Gandhi's tactics of civil non-cooperation and, at the same time, thought it possible to take part in elections. On the left's suggestion the INC passed a resolution in 1927 announcing complete independence of India the ultimate objective (hitherto it had spoken essentially of granting India dominion rights). Such in general outline were the conditions in which the activity of Indian Communists was beginning.

The Comintern based its attitude to Indian problems on the decisions of the Second Congress on the national and colonial questions, worked out and adopted under Lenin's guidance. The Eastern Section of the Comintern Executive Committee conducted the practical work; in the early years M. N. Roy took an active part in its activity. Ultra-revolutionary and sectarian views remained typical of Roy even after the Second Congress, but, of course, it was not Roy who determined the Comintern policy in regard to India.

On 17 October 1920 Roy organised in Tashkent the first Indian communist group (from revolutionary emigres). It took the name of the Indian Communist Party; its founder members were seven people, including M. N. Roy and Abani Mukherji. The group announced that it was in accord with Comintern principles and would begin to draw up a programme taking into account India's specific conditions. The first Indian Communists came from its ranks. Later on they were to render considerable assistance to the Comintern Executive Committee in establishing contacts with the communist movement in India. Some of them received training in the Communist University of Working People of the East. But the group organised by Roy in Tashkent did not become a Comintern section. The Communist Party of India (CPI) is quite right in dating its formation later—December 1925, when communist groups that had emerged and were operating in India itself united.

The communist movement in the East then possessed inherent and apparently irreconcilable elements: in intention decisively to distance itself from the nationalist forces—and the still

remaining nationalist aspirations; an appeal directly to the working people so as to attract them to its side—and insufficient ability to take their demands and mood into account; hopes for aid from the peasants—and attempts to attain their goals without the peasantry. Despite the existence of all manner of errors and deviations, the incipient communist movement in the East was moving forward, striving to apply in practice Marxist-Leninist theory which it was only just mastering. It encountered innumerable obstacles and had difficulty orienting itself in the most complex situation.

Two factors could help the communist parties and groups of the East in their ideological-political formation: on the one hand, there was the experience of their own political struggle, the theoretical and practical work; on the other there was the help and leadership of the Comintern.

In the early 1920s a few communist groups arose in India. As a rule, they had split off from the radical wing of the Indian National Congress and the trade unions. In mid-1922 Roy informed the Eastern Section of the Comintern Executive Committee that the League of Radical Congressmen party had been set up in Bombay and its leaders had sent him the brochure entitled "Gandhi vs. Lenin". He was referring to the well-known speech by Sripat Amrit Dange in April 1921. Roy was complimentary about the book whose contents showed that the author, a young Indian revolutionary, was changing to Marxist-Leninist positions. In late 1922 the above-mentioned group which Dange now headed had begun to call itself the Socialist Labour Party. The Comintern Eastern Section established contact with it through Roy. A communist group also came into existence in Madras. Chettiar Sringaravelu was most prominent there among the Communists. At the same time he was Chairman of the local National Congress committee; in his own words he had intended to travel to Moscow back in 1920 so as to take part in the Comintern Congress, but he had been unable to go.

Dange writes that "the news of the Russian revolution and the subsequent developments in the Soviet Union attracted" him to Marxism-Leninism. In the brochure "Gandhi vs. Lenin" Dange explained that he to a large extent "stood on the side of Lenin" in advocating defence of revolutionary changes of society.<sup>1</sup> Dange later recalled that he and those about him in the early 1920s had mastered national-revolutionary doctrines. The ending of the non-cooperation campaign had considerable

<sup>1</sup> See: *New Age*, 17 May 1964, p. 10.

importance for drawing leading fighters for Indian independence to communism. The most important notion through which Dange set up one of the first communist organisations of India was that of the leading role of the working class. At that time, he wrote, "we were not very clear about ourselves. We expected the Communist International to do something to guide us."<sup>1</sup> Already in December 1922 he had tried to unite the scattered communist groups into a communist party. Dange's group functioned in contact with left Congressmen and, in particular, with Bose.

In May 1922, the Comintern learned that a communist group had been set up in Bengal (Calcutta) as well, and established contact with it. Muzaffar Ahmad was the group's leader. It enjoyed support from Calcutta sailors and port workers. In 1959, Ahmad recalled, "It is needless to add that all of us were inspired by the Communist International." As he admitted, at that time when he was organising the Calcutta group, "My knowledge of Marxism was very superficial. But when I took the leap into the unknown, I counted on two things—my faith in the people and my unquestioned loyalty to the directives of the Communist International."<sup>2</sup> Another communist group sprang up in Lahore, this one headed by Ghulam Hussain, Secretary of the Union of North-West Railway Workers. The group published a monthly journal in Urdu.

The British colonial authorities launched repression against leading figures in the Indian communist movement. Between 1923 and 1924 the colonial police arrested the Indian Communists Dange, Ahmad, Hussain, Sringaravelu and several others. The authorities began to prepare a trial of Communists in Kanpur. In that situation the progressive journalist Satyabhakta, who had gradually been moving to Marxist positions, organised in September 1924 the legal National Communist Party of India in Kanpur.

In 1925, therefore, there already existed the Bombay, Calcutta, Lahore, Madras and Kanpur communist groups. Small groups and individual Communists also operated in other cities and provinces. According to Roy's statistics, in 1925 there were no more than 800 Communists in India. Comintern contacts with them at that time were irregular. Roy's letters to Indian

Communists were often intercepted by the police, and in 1922 Roy's emissary Charles Ashleigh who had been sent to Dange had been detained.

In 1923 Chettiar Sringaravelu founded the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Hindustan in Madras; its activity has been little studied up to now. The fact, however, that on 31 January 1924 it sent a telegram to its local sections is extremely significant; the contents of the telegram were as follows: "The Workers' and Peasants' Central Committee asks all its provincial organisations to mark the end of the week as a day of mourning for Comrade Nikolai Lenin, Chairman of the Federative Soviet Republic of Russian Workers. His death means that the workers of the world have lost a teacher and deliverer. A black flag flies at half-mast above the Party headquarters."

In the autumn of 1920 Roy organised in Tashkent a military school for Indian revolutionary emigres. He believed that Central Asia would be the arrival point of more and more groups of Indian emigres from which a revolutionary shock detachment could be formed. As he presumed, the detachment would make an incursion into Indian territory and arm the local population which would then rise up against the authorities. The military school did not last long (up to May 1921). Experience showed the whole recklessness and futility of Roy's "plan".<sup>1</sup>

On 3 January 1921 Roy and Mukherji sent a letter to Gandhi in Puna.

They informed him of the setting up in Soviet Russia of an organisation "for revolutionary work in India".<sup>2</sup> The organisation had been formed in Russia because of the "favourable opportunities existing here". Roy and Mukherji wrote: "You perhaps know of the Second Congress of the Communist International which took place in Moscow in August ... 1920, in the course of which the colonial theses read by Comrade Lenin and the Indian revolutionary known under the name of Roy showed that all peoples fighting for freedom against foreign rule should be granted assistance." The letter went on to say that, "The theses clearly stated that any revolutionary nationalist movement in countries under the sway of foreign imperialism could receive such assistance." As these words

<sup>1</sup> S. A. Dange, *S. V. Ghate. Our First General Secretary*, Communist Party Publication, New Delhi, 1971, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Muzaffar Ahmad, *Communist Party of India. Years of Formation 1921-1933*, National Book Agency Private Limited, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 7, 8.

<sup>1</sup> For more details see: M. A. Persits, *Revolutionaries of India in Soviet Russia. Mainsprings of the Communist Movement of the East*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1983, pp. 114-120.

<sup>2</sup> They evidently had in mind the communist group set up in Tashkent in October 1920.

show the letter allowed for the possibility, in principle, that a nationalist movement could be revolutionary.

The principal objective of the new organisation, wrote Roy and Mukherji, was to convene an All-India Revolutionary Congress of delegates from all revolutionary groups and tendencies in India. This congress would set up a "Central Revolutionary Party" which would receive "the assistance that can be rendered from here". The authors of the letter suggested to Gandhi that he take part in the coming congress and informed him of the establishment in Tashkent of the military school for Indian revolutionaries. They asked Gandhi to acquaint all "revolutionary organisations" with the contents of the letter and to spread among them the theses of the Second Comintern Congress on the national-colonial question.

It should be stated that the letter was over-optimistic about the prospects for Indian revolution and overemphasised the possibility of a shift of the Revolutionary Congress to the left, as well as the possibility of forming a new revolutionary mass party. Meanwhile its authors endeavoured to outline ways to implement the decisions of the Second Comintern Congress as applied to Indian conditions. Roy and Mukherji proposed to nationalists of India an agreement on concerted action, reckoning that all or part of them would act in a revolutionary way. The proposals contained in the letter were not an ultimatum.

What were the tactical and strategic propositions of the Comintern Executive in regard to the national liberation and communist movements of India?

In working out the programme documents which could be suggested to the nationalist organisations in India, the Executive increasingly focused attention on establishing a communist party there. In August 1921 the Small Bureau of the ECCI adopted a decision to empower a "small revolutionary group" (Indian) to take up the cause of communist propaganda in India.

A real communist party, the Executive believed, should be set up in India itself. The Comintern based itself on the notion that communist movement in India could not be "organised" from without; in a situation of upsurge in revolutionary feeling, the nucleus of a future communist organisation would arise precisely within the country. The Executive constantly tried to convince Roy of that, although he held to the view that the group of Communists operating outside India could become a leading force of the Indian revolution. Dange was right to say that the Communist Party of India, being part of the

world communist movement, could function and develop successfully only on Indian soil.

Meanwhile, Roy had done much to harm relations with those Indian revolutionary nationalists who were in the Soviet Union, maintained relations with the Comintern but had not moved to communist positions. They included Abdur Rabb Barq. In a letter to Georgi Chicherin in July 1921 he made the point that communist revolution was not to be expected in India soon; Roy had over-optimistically assessed prospects for social revolution. Barq protested at Roy's attempts to force revolutionary nationalists in Soviet Russia to accept the ideas of communism, in some degree transferring his irritation with Roy's actions to the Comintern as well.

In his evaluation of certain of Roy's views, Abdur Rabb Barq was quite right on many points. But one must remember that the dispute was not between a "left Communist" and a Communist taking up a proper position, but between a Communist and a non-Communist. Barq was not faced with the problems that stood before Roy. Being a revolutionary nationalist he had no thoughts of setting up a communist party.

In August 1921 a commission of the ECCI Small Bureau came to the conclusion that of all the principal groups of Indian revolutionaries only Roy's group was ready for "acting on a communist basis". The extent of that readiness, perhaps, was exaggerated, but on the whole the commission was right: neither the Indian Revolutionary Association headed by Abdur Rabb Barq and M. P. T. Acharya, nor the group headed by Chattopadhyaya and Luhani were communist. The task was now to work out ways to promote the communist movement in India. Roy did not see the whole complexity of that task, while the nationalist-revolutionaries did not even set themselves such a task.

The Small Bureau commission recommended the Comintern to grant direct assistance to nationalist organisations in India if the opportunity was to present itself. The letter by Roy and Mukherji to Gandhi, the proposal of the Small Bureau commission and the August decision of the Small Bureau were all links in Comintern activity in carrying out the decisions of the Second Comintern Congress.

At the end of 1921 Roy and Mukherji sent a message to the Ahmadabad session of the Indian National Congress.<sup>1</sup> In the main the message said that India was facing a great polit-

<sup>1</sup> See: *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol. 1, 1917-1922, New Delhi, 1970, pp. 341-54 (further on referred to as *Documents...*).

ical, economic and social revolution. The popular movement was being led by the INC, which had taken that "great mission" upon itself. The Indian National Congress had become the political organisation and leader of national liberation. It had to rely on the common people, to have its finger on the pulse of the people. The National Congress had put forward the slogan of swaraj (self-government), but that was not enough; what was needed was to lead the people under the banner of swaraj. The INC should think about these needs. Indian working people wanted to eat at least twice a day, but they were deprived of that opportunity. The INC needed to remember that if it wished to rely on the majority of the people. Therefore the INC should concern itself not only with the interests of just one class—the merchants and industrialists; otherwise the workers and peasants would form their own political party. Hence, the message said, the INC should equip itself with the demands and slogans of the worker and peasant trade unions.

In this document, Roy and Mukherji obviously went further than in their previous letter to Gandhi. They expected that their message would induce the Congress leaders to more decisive action, to a more consistent fight for the urgent interests of workers and peasants. In itself that idea was realistic. It corresponded to the political line of the Third Comintern Congress and to a united front policy, clearly formulated by the ECCI in late 1921. But at the same time, the message was shot through with the idea that conditions could appear at any time in India for setting up a new national organisation. In that sense the message markedly reflected the views of Roy who did not believe in the progressive possibilities of the Indian National Congress. Roy and Mukherji wrote to the INC that the vertical lines of social division of Indian society (into castes, religions, creeds, etc.) were wearing away, and the gap was widening between the "two great classes". But the gap was not widening as swiftly as the authors of the message thought; the classes were not as big and in India there were by no means only two classes. Besides, the proletariat as a class had certainly not formed completely.

In December 1922, a message to the regular INC session then meeting in Gaya was drawn up by the Comintern Executive Committee on behalf of the Presidium of the Fourth Congress. It spoke of the most important directions of Comintern policy in regard to the national liberation, labour and communist movement in India. It noted that the delegates of the Gaya session were "representatives of the Indian people" and the

Communist International heartily supported the Indian people in its struggle for liberation; it described the feudal landowning class as an ally of imperialism and a foe of the Indian people.

The message was fully in line with the tactical principles of Marxism-Leninism, according to which the major blow should be struck against the most reactionary forces and any split of interests of the ruling classes should be used. The Comintern message also contained the following idea: the anti-imperialist struggle could be successful only in conjunction with the popular struggle for resolving the tasks of the *democratic, anti-feudal revolution*. The Comintern Executive had never divorced the task of national liberation from the goal of that revolution. Roy (at least at the Second Comintern Congress) had posed the question differently: *either national struggle or the movement of working and exploited people*. The prominent Indian Communist Gangadhar M. Adhikari remarked that Lenin in his dispute with M.N. Roy had indicated the need to combine both aspects of the liberation struggle and never to permit the national liberation movement developing in the colonies and dependencies to be counterposed to the movement of workers and peasants.<sup>1</sup> The Comintern strictly adhered to that only correct position. Its message to the INC was an attempt to spell that out in concrete terms.

Further, the Executive Committee drew the National Congress's attention to the fact that the "evolutionary nationalism" typical of the leaders of the propertied classes narrowed the tasks of the national movement to the demand for autonomy within the British Empire. In other words, the Comintern was posing the question as follows: in order for anti-imperialist nationalism to be effective it had to be revolutionary, to rely on the people. Right-wing elements within the INC, the message emphasised, were clashing with the aspiration not only of the people of India, but of the rest of the National Congress. The sections of the population, by dint of their economic interests standing opposed to British imperialism, were forming, wrote the Comintern, "the overwhelming majority of the nation, since they include the bankrupt middle classes, pauperised peasantry and the exploited workers".<sup>2</sup> The Comintern highly assessed the achievements of the INC in launching the anti-imperialist struggle, yet reproached INC

<sup>1</sup> See: G. Adhikari, "Lenin on Roy's Supplementary Colonial Theses", *Marxist Miscellany*, Delhi, 1970, No. 1, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents...*, pp. 573-77.

leadership in lagging behind the upsurge in the liberation movement. The Comintern drew INC leaders' attention to the need for them to formulate their programme in line with the requirements and demands of the great bulk of the nation. The message ended with the calls: "Down with British Imperialism!" and "Long live the free people of India!"

The Comintern then regarded the INC as a field of struggle for the people. It undoubtedly saw ever-mounting popular pressure in the INC as a paramount task of the communist movement that was forming in India; this had to lead to an intensification of its left wing; Communists and the progressive group in the INC, the Comintern felt, should join together in a united front. The Comintern recommendations to the INC fully accorded with that course.<sup>1</sup> It combined revolutionary spirit and realism in its document: in the movement being led by the INC it saw a force in whose success Communists were directly interested.<sup>2</sup>

The INC session in Gaya received also another document—an extensive draft action programme drawn up by M. N. Roy. The

<sup>1</sup> *Documents...*, pp. 573-77.

<sup>2</sup> The Comintern consistently and resolutely rejected the viewpoint according to which the inability, observed in certain historical circumstances, of non-proletarian (intermediate) socio-political groups to take revolutionary action was allegedly absolutely in tune with the interests of the proletariat and its party. Trotsky and his supporters had long ago challenged the Comintern with that notion. They maintained that if all the non-proletarian (intermediate) forces were unable to campaign for any progressive objectives whatsoever, so much the better. As a result, Communists and the proletariat would become "already now" the only embodiment of any progress; they would concentrate within themselves all the energy of society's onward development. Therefore, from the viewpoint of the proponents of "permanent revolution", the coming of the proletariat to power was *in all circumstances and at any stage of revolution* the only possible resolution of problems of all remaining classes and social groups discontent with the existing system. Such a resolution would be accelerated a hundredfold by the political impotence of those classes and groups. That, therefore, would constitute a necessary condition for the proletariat's victory. History, however, confirmed the thesis of Marxist-Leninist theory: the revolutionary process develops ultimately more effectively and rapidly if the non-proletarian (intermediate) classes and sections realise more fully their progressive potential. This realisation takes place, naturally, in a reformist as well as revolutionary way. Sectarians, however, take a dim view of any reforms which, they believe, hamper revolution. But counteraction to progressive measures of other, non-proletarian classes and forces hampers the revolution to an incomparably greater degree. The Trotskyite point of view in fact was reduced to just such a "recommendation" to Communists; in the hope that all problems would be resolved at one blow, to oppose perfectly realistic socio-economic and political changes of a progressive nature. In actuality, that should lead to the isolation of Communists from the people, put them in a position of being an anti-popular force rather than a national leader.

programme may be reduced to the following: the attainment of full national independence, the establishment of a national government on the basis of universal suffrage, elimination of landowners' possessions, nationalisation of the land, establishment of maximum rent payments, institution of agricultural banks, removal of all indirect taxes and introduction of a progressive income tax, nationalisation of the mines, the railways, establishment of the minimum bracket for wages and an eight-hour working day, universal arming of the people, etc. The programme also indicated methods of struggle: the setting up of militant peasant organisations, mass workers' demonstrations and strikes (it was thought that the strikers would receive material help from the INC funds).<sup>1</sup>

While the Comintern message to the INC spearheaded it for attaining mass support, so as to resolve the tasks of the National Congress and intensify its left wing, the draft programme was a document designed (according to Roy) to split the National Congress and encourage the formation of a new national-revolutionary party, while the INC was a party representing the alliance of national-reformist and national-revolutionary elements. It was intended not to help move the INC to the left, but to split it and take control of its left wing. And not simply to take charge of the left wing, but to use it merely as a legal "cover" for the Communist Party of India. Roy believed that a future communist party would straightaway become a mass party and immediately occupy leading positions within the national liberation struggle.

It is easy to see that the draft programme compiled by Roy contradicted the Comintern line and did not accord with the real situation in the country. The Comintern oriented communist groups in India on creating a united party so that it could work within the INC, in a mass organisation which was headed by national-bourgeois circles and within which a struggle was in progress for domination between various political orientations, and so that it could extend and strengthen its influence among the people and radicalise the National Congress as a whole. Roy's idea was that the INC was falling apart and Communists would with ease quickly organise a national-revolutionary party to take its place under their leadership. That

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 577-88. The draft programme was published in a newspaper put out by Roy in Europe, as well as printed in the form of a leaflet that ended up in India in December 1922; on 21 December Reuters News Agency communicated its contents to India.

was a mistake. One should not, however, forget that the popularity of the INC at that time, after the end of the civil non-cooperation campaign, had considerably diminished. It is possible that Roy believed that the Indian National Congress could expect the same fate as the Indonesian Sarekat Islam.

As mentioned earlier, the first Workers' and Peasants' Party was set up in Madras (on 1 May, on the day when May Day was first celebrated on Indian soil). At first it was assumed that such parties would arise in many other provinces, and then a conference of their members could be held in Lakhnau. It was expected that the conference would be attended by communist delegates from Bombay, Calcutta and Kanpur, by leaders of the peasant movement from the United Provinces, the Punjab and Madras, and also by eminent INC leaders. None of these hopes were to be realised. There was still no united communist party in India, while other organisations of working people were attracted by the Congress and remained within its orbit.

At the end of 1922 the Eastern Section document (Presidium Report) noted the crisis of the national movement and the spontaneous emergence of communist groups in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. The document said that it was of prime importance for Communists in India "to set up a communist party powerful enough through the worker and peasant movement to take over leadership of the national struggle". The colonial possessions in India were at that time one of the most important props of British imperialism, and the absence of a communist party ultimately was having an adverse effect on the world struggle against capital and on its prospects. The Comintern Executive posed the question of setting up a communist party in India before it did so in regard, for example, to the Philippines or Indochina.

The Fifth Plenum of the Enlarged Comintern Executive which met between March and April 1925 discussed in detail the situation in India and adopted an extensive resolution "On Work in India". The national liberation movement in India, the Plenum said, was at the crossroads. Repression by the colonial authorities, contradictions inherent in the national parties all went to weaken the organised resistance of the Indian people to British imperialism. The task of Communists was to stimulate the national liberation movement through a resolute struggle for the independence of India. The Plenum came to the conclusion that there was a tendency to organisation of those integral parts of the national movement which were

not following the Swarajists—many of the petty bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, students, workers and peasants. Communists, the Plenum stressed, should continue their work in the INC and, in particular, among left-wing Swarajists, as well as within other national organisations for "establishing a mass national-revolutionary party and an all-India anti-imperialist alliance"; it was necessary to set up a popular party whose slogans would be separation from the empire, a democratic republic, universal suffrage and abolition of feudal relations. The "more progressive part of the bourgeoisie" would back such a party. The resolution noted: success in establishing an anti-imperialist alliance may be achieved only if the communist groups of India unite in a single working-class party. "The Communists of India can only play an active part in organising and leading the revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle if they are a well organised, politically conscious vanguard of the working class, clearly aware of the historic importance of the movement for national liberation and in close cooperation with the world proletariat (especially with the British workers)." The Comintern encouraged the unification of communist groups into a party, oriented them on work within the INC, proposed its own cooperation to the INC and, in line with the policy of creating a national-revolutionary party within the framework of the National Congress, restrained Roy from his extremism.

In September 1924 Satyabhakta, who had set up in Kanpur the legal Indian Communist Party, announced the convocation within three months of an All-India Communist Conference (preparations for which took, however, more than a year). He published draft programme documents which said that Communists should advocate three principal goals: to attain India's national independence, to establish a society of social justice and to organise a new state representing the interests of the working people. Nothing was said in the documents of a transitional period between the gaining of national independence and the creation of a socialist state. The authors believed that the liberation movement of the Indian people would resolve those tasks simultaneously.

The idea of calling a unity conference had been voiced earlier, so its convocation was essentially a matter of several communist groups.<sup>1</sup> The Conference met between 25 and 26 December 1925 in Kanpur. As Adhikari writes, all genuinely

<sup>1</sup> See: S. A. Darge, *S. V. Ghate...*, p. 13.



communist groups were represented at it.<sup>1</sup> Sringaravelu Chettiar took the chair at the Conference. In his opening address he did not pose the question of the new party affiliating to the Comintern. As Soviet research has shown, this stance was tactically correct in view of the circumstances in which the Conference met and could not be construed as anti-Comintern. The Conference was meeting legally, which enabled Communists widely to propagate their views. But if they had revealed their intention of making the party a section of the Comintern the Conference would have been dispersed, the new party would have been smashed straightaway, its leaders thrown into prison and, thus, the Conference would not have performed its main function of constituting the party.

In Chettiar's opinion, Communists ought to take part in the struggle for national liberation. Self-government won as a result, he believed, would be proletarian and not bourgeois. In other words, a direct consequence of the anti-imperialist revolution, as expected, would have to be a socialist state. Did that testify merely to an inability to approach revolution as a stage-by-stage process? By no means. Of course, Chettiar (like many other Indian Communists) was over-optimistic about the real balance of class and political forces in the country and simplified the path to the socialist goal. But in order to have a proper understanding of the step-by-step development of revolution one had, of course, to be clear about its final goals. Only then could one think of stages along the way to it. Many Indian Communists were only bringing their views into a system, including those on the goal of revolution, the ways and means of attaining it.

Although the INC was a bourgeois organisation, thought Chettiar, under Gandhi's leadership it had acquired great popularity during the non-cooperation movement; "the active cooperation of the organised labour is necessary for any party bent upon achieving swaraj."<sup>2</sup> The Congress was nevertheless insufficiently consistent in organising and educating the workers. Communists had to take that upon themselves. At the same time Chettiar thought it necessary for Communists to have a hand in the work of the Congress.

On 26 December the Conference adopted the Party Constitu-

<sup>1</sup> See: G. Adhikari, "The First Indian Communist Conference", *Marxist Miscellany*, No. 4, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol. 2, 1923-1925, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 649, 650.

tion. The Preamble to the Constitution proclaimed the formation of the Communist Party of India as a party whose ultimate goal was to be the liberation of workers and peasants. "The immediate object of the party shall be the securing of a living wage for the workers and peasants."<sup>1</sup> In the campaign to implement its ideals and its programme of direct action, the Constitution said, the Party would enter into cooperation with other political parties, but would also act independently. The Party would use all legal forms of work. The Constitution also noted that "the party shall consist of Communists only who will pledge themselves to carry out its objects."<sup>2</sup> It envisaged the formation of five provincial Party centres—Calcutta, Bombay, Kanpur, Madras and Lahore. On 28 December the communist participants in the Conference chose the Central Executive Committee composed of members of the main communist groups.

Problems of the liberation movement in India were discussed in March 1926 once again at the Sixth Plenum of the Enlarged ECCI. It underlined in its resolution that "No one save Communists are able to lead the Indian proletariat in a historic struggle for national independence and social liberty." It still had not had objective information on the Kanpur Conference (Roy was largely to blame for that), and so the resolution noted that the many attempts that had been made to unite the scattered communist groups had been so far unsuccessful. As the most important task of Indian Communists the Plenum nominated the setting up of a strong communist party on the basis of the existing communist groups. It underlined the importance of work by Indian Communists within the unions so as to turn the All-India Trade Union Congress "into a militant proletarian organisation". The Plenum noted that the peasantry, whom the proletariat was to lead, would be a decisive factor for the destiny of the Indian revolution. Therefore, Indian Communists were recommended to adopt a detailed programme of work among the peasant masses so as to unite the various peasant organisations into a single general national organisation under the influence of Communists. "National liberation remains a burning political problem," the ECCI emphasised. The Plenum noted the compromise "between the upper sections of native bourgeoisie and imperialism". A simplified approach to the complex problem of class differentiation of Indian society was alien to the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 668.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem.*

Comintern Executive Committee: "Recognition of the proletariat as the overwhelming factor in the struggle against imperialism should not lead to underestimating the role of social classes that lie between the *big* [my italics—A.R.] bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Those intermediate classes form the overwhelming majority of the population and are the victims of capitalist exploitation." In the opinion of the Executive Committee, the formation of a revolutionary-nationalist organisation whose social support would be the middle classes, the intelligentsia, petty bourgeoisie and peasantry was still on the agenda in India. Indian Communists had to enter that organisation as the most active force so as later to occupy a vanguard position in the popular struggle for national emancipation. The revolutionary-nationalist organisation was to arise as a result of work within the INC by Communists, but they should not strive to "seize" leadership of it. That point of view was close to Executive Committee conclusions in relation to Indonesia. It felt it impermissible, we may recall, for Indonesian Communists to try to "seize" leading posts in the national-revolutionary organisation which might arise in the future.

The Comintern recommended Indian Communists to do the following: to work within the INC; to form an alliance with its left-wing groups for the purpose of putting pressure on the right; to strengthen the left wing of the Congress, so that it went over to national-revolutionary positions. The Comintern advised Indian Communists to act within the Congress so that the organisation would begin to fight for the vital interests of the working people. At the same time, Comintern believed. Communists should fortify and extend their own influence and mass base within the INC; that way (acting "*wherever the masses are to be found*") they would be able to establish a broad revolutionary organisation on the basis of the Congress's left wing; to influence its policy, but by no means try to "seize" control of it or "turn" it into a communist party. This plan radically differed from the scheme that Roy had proposed: to recommend demands that were unacceptable to the Congress and thereby to "expose" it in the people's eyes, to draw the people into an organisation set up and straightaway led by Communists. While the Comintern was suggesting to Communists a fundamentally rational path to vanguard role within the national movement, even though at that time it to a certain extent underestimated the length and difficulty of that path, Roy's scheme was absolutely unrealistic.

On 1 December 1926 the Communist Party of India brought

out A Manifesto to the All-India National Congress, which criticised the Swarajists for their parliamentary illusions: "The Swaraj Party cannot rescue itself from the deadening grip of bourgeois influence." Communists sharply criticised the moderate demand for India to be given dominion rights and indicated the community of interests of Hindu and Muslim workers. The Manifesto expressed the attitude of Indian Communists to the national bourgeoisie. The train of thought of the authors of the document in general outline was as follows. The Indian bourgeoisie could not implement aspirations for domination without challenging imperialism; on the other hand, fear of the popular movement would lead it to betray national interests for the sake of class interests by collaborating with imperialism. At first glance the Manifesto contained a sectarian conclusion on the "nationalist bourgeoisie". It was described as "a new ally of imperialism". But by the term "nationalist bourgeoisie", as the Manifesto text clearly demonstrates, it understood only the top ranks of the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy. Indian Communists did not reject hope of exciting wide sections of the bourgeois classes to a more decisive struggle against imperialism. The Congress programme, as the Manifesto indicated, should contain such demands as national independence, a republic, national assembly elected by universal adult suffrage; transfer of land to the tillers; an eight-hour day and minimum living wage; the right for workers and peasants to combine and to strike, etc. The Communist Party of India proposed to National Congress members that they make two points the centre of their programme: national independence and complete democratisation of national life in every respect. Beneath the Manifesto was the signature: "The Communist Party of India".<sup>2</sup>

The text of this document important in the Party's history testifies that Indian Communists who penned the Manifesto were ready to cooperate with the National Congress (on the basis of anti-imperialist and democratic demands). The Comintern advice evidently played no small part in that. Representatives of fraternal parties in the Comintern leadership back in August 1926 had got in touch with Indian Communists through the medium of British Communist Party figures journeying to India, orienting the Indian Party on work within patriotic organisations so as

<sup>1</sup> *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol. 3, 1926, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 236-47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

to strengthen the left wing of the latter, on every possible use of progressive opportunities in such organisations, on radicalisation of the Congress under popular influence. That policy, the Comintern believed, would be effective only if the Indian Party were to be a united party enjoying the backing of the people, and above all the industrial workers. That was how the Comintern saw the way for the party to win a leading position within the national liberation movement.

A Communist Party conference took place in Bombay in May 1927. The Party Executive Committee reported, in particular, that Kanpur was a centre of the incipient communist movement in India: Satyabhakta had succeeded in setting up an Indian Communist Party whose ideology, however, was not yet fully Marxist. The Communist Party had been set up in Kanpur in 1925 at a conference that had taken place under the leadership of genuinely communist groups. Indian Communists had seen their task primarily in stimulating left-wing forces of the INC and the All-India Trade Union Congress.

The Bombay conference adopted a new Communist Party Constitution which stated, in particular, that a Party member could only be a person who accepted the programme of the Communist International.<sup>1</sup> A Foreign Bureau of the Party was set up which was to operate in line with the Party programme and decisions. According to the Constitution the Party was to hold annual congresses and formulate its programme and policy at them; it was to conduct work within the INC and the All-India Trade Union Congress. It also adopted a resolution entitled "The Communist Party of India appeals to world communist parties and the International for leadership and guidance in work carried out by the Party within the country". The Party programme adopted at the conference contained the demand for swaraj. The Party called on all its members to enter the INC and to help set up a left wing in it, to cooperate with radical nationalists on the basis of the minimum programme (full national independence, a democratic republic on the basis of universal suffrage, elimination of landowning farming, reform of the taxation system, industrialisation of the country, establishment of the eight-hour day and minimum wages, etc.). From an analysis of material from the Bombay conference it would seem that the minimum programme worked out by the Comintern in the early 1920s continued to be used by Indian

<sup>1</sup> It is clear from the Executive Committee report that the Party had not yet joined the Comintern.

Communists as a means of exerting an influence on the INC from the left, as a means of radicalising it.

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After the Kanpur Conference Indian Communists did a great deal to set up and operate legal workers' and peasants' parties, which they understood as an alternative to the national-reformist organisations, not to the Communist Party. As far as the question of "stability" of the Indian National Congress (as of Sarekat Islam in Indonesia) was concerned, it could only be resolved in the course of the struggle itself.

In the period 1925-1927 several workers' and peasants' parties sprang up in Bengal, Bombay, the United Provinces and the Punjab. They were first established as left-wing nationalist organisations of workers and peasants within the INC; later Communists began to take over the leadership of them. But such parties did not last long. The main reason was the terror launched by the British authorities and the presence of a very powerful rival in the traditional Congress organisations. Moreover, individual Communist Party leaders entered the leadership of workers' and peasants' parties, striving to lend them simultaneously a mass character, and shift them to communist positions. These two aspects were simply incompatible in Indian conditions of the time. These tactics undoubtedly belong to those "sectarian mistakes" to the existence of which in the late 1920s and early 1930s Indian Communists themselves indicated later, and led to a situation where the mass base of the workers' and peasants' parties began to narrow. Moreover, the implementation by Communists of leadership of the workers' and peasants' parties was understood by some of them as control over the legal party apparatus by the illegal (and, after all, it was against such ideas and the practical actions emanating from them that the Comintern had warned).

The Comintern Executive, attentively studying the prospects for the workers' and peasants' parties in India, experienced increasing doubts about the expediency of that form of organisation; it feared that work to create such parties might nonetheless hamper the organisation of a united communist party; what is more, it was not sure about the proper effectiveness of the activity of such parties within the INC. Meanwhile their existence was a real fact; taking this into consideration, the Executive Committee made recommendations on the subject of the workers' and peasants' parties.

In December 1927, the Comintern prepared a letter to the

Central Committee of the workers' and peasants' party of Bengal. Above all it pointed out that the formation of a workers' and peasants' party by no means signified the "elimination of the communist party". It emphasised the need to preserve and safeguard the ideological-political and organisational independence of the Communist Party of India. That was a correct, timely and very important piece of advice. It also recommended combining illegal forms of struggle with legal ones and to strive for the right to a legal existence. At the same time, it felt that the major dangers for Indian Communists were legalism and adoption of bourgeois nationalist positions. Finally, the letter clearly expressed the view that the workers' and peasants' party should not be simply a "legal cover" for the Communist Party. To avoid that, wrote the Executive Committee, it was sufficient merely to change the name and have only one party with legal and underground organisations. Further, the workers' and peasants' party was a gathering point for all exploited elements in society (the proletariat, peasantry and petty bourgeoisie) which were to combine in the revolutionary struggle against foreign imperialism and local reaction; the programme of such a party should not and could not be communist. It had to be a programme of democratic revolution.

The First All-India Conference of Workers' and Peasants' Parties was held in Calcutta in December 1928; it adopted a policy of attracting the revolutionary sections of the INC into those parties. The Comintern sent a message to the conference. It supported the revolutionary movements of working and oppressed people, and therefore welcomed the conference of parties fighting against imperialist tyranny and feudal reaction at one of the most important sectors of the world anti-imperialist front. However, it expressed its doubt about whether the workers' and peasants' parties were an expedient and effective form of organisation. It believed that the revolutionary worker-peasant alliance should arise not in the form of a united worker-peasant party, but on the basis of actual cooperation between the proletarian party and peasant allies (the Comintern was trying to avoid the dissolution of the recently formed Communist Party of India in non-communist worker-peasant organisations). In regard to an evaluation of the political situation in India, the Comintern felt at the time that the country was confronted by a national revolution whose aim was to overthrow the foreign yoke; the working class, peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie would be the moving forces of that revolution. Again and again the Comintern

stressed the need for an independent political party of the working class.

A "reorganisation" of united parties into the Communist Party took place at the Calcutta Conference, and its new Executive Committee was elected. Soon after, by decision of the Executive Committee the workers' and peasants' parties were declared disbanded so that part of their membership could be accepted into the Communist Party of India, turning it into a relatively mass party. The British colonialists realised what danger that posed for them. In a few days the authorities of British India arrested 31 activists of the Communist Party in various areas of the country and began to prepare a trial of "communist conspirators" (it became known as the Meerut Conspiracy Case). The Party was once again the victim of repression.

In October 1929 the Comintern Executive returned to the question of the communist movement in India—on the basis of the assessments of the Sixth Congress which had met a year earlier. The ECCI decision contained the conclusion that the Indian bourgeoisie had come right up to a capitulation deal with capitalism, while the working class had already become the decisive force of revolutionary upsurge. The national bourgeoisie was covering up its capitulation to imperialism by left-wing phrases. That was a contradictory evaluation. On the one hand, the Comintern Executive did not think it possible to state that a deal between imperialism and Indian national-bourgeois groups had already been made; on the other hand, the fact that the deal had not yet occurred was explained merely by tactical considerations on the part of the Indian national bourgeoisie. At that time the Comintern upheld the slogan of a worker-peasant republic which was to be won through anti-imperialist struggle under proletarian leadership.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It had recommended this slogan to several communist parties in oppressed countries in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The slogan appeared as a result of changes in Comintern policy consolidated by decisions of the Sixth Congress (see Chapter 3). There were, however, specific factors motivating the ECCI to modify its tactics in regard to the liberation movement in India to a greater degree than to other oppressed countries. The labour movement in India at that time was stronger than in any other country of the East; the development of capitalist relations had gone much farther than in the Philippines, Indonesia or Indochina; the specific Indian phenomenon of Gandhian ideology reflecting the aspirations and sentiments of the widest sections of the Indian people, being on the whole a factor of great anti-imperialist force, often appeared in its political aspect as a tactic of manoeuvre; and as such at that time was interpreted by Communists mainly as capitulation of Indian nationalism to imperialism.

The most important aspect of the Comintern Executive Committee decision was that it focused attention on the need to strengthen the Communist Party of India, to win to its side the working class through work within the unions, to intensify work among the peasants while associating tasks of an agrarian revolution with the movement for independence. In that decision the Comintern, while expressing the idea that a split in the reformist Trade Union Congress was not a severe setback to the labour movement, all the same thought it necessary to stress that the split did not meet the interests of Communists and that the latter should safeguard the unity of the trade union movement.

In April 1930 the Comintern Presidium discussed the question of the communist movement in India. Leader of the Eastern Secretariat Otto Kuusinen made the report. Examination of the question, he said, was associated with a sharp upsurge in the revolutionary movement in India. Historical experience, he declared, fully bore out the correctness of the conclusions of the Sixth Congress in condemning the "decolonisation theory", according to which the industrialisation of India would lead to the complete fusion of interests of the Indian national bourgeoisie and imperialism; it had not committed ultimate national betrayal and was still capable of fighting for the independence of India. The "eleven demands" which Gandhi had presented to the British, said Kuusinen, were by no means "imaginary".<sup>1</sup> What particularly worried the Eastern Secretariat was the fact that the Communist Party of India was still a small organisation.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s the Communist Party of India ran into considerable difficulties; repressions by the colonial regime, weakening of party influence in the unions, intensification of sectarian tendencies and factional activity within the Party. As a result the Party was unable to take effective part in the mass anti-imperialist struggle in the early 1930s. The decision of the Presidium of the Thirteenth ECCI Plenum, "Tasks of the Communist Party of India", held in December 1933, was of considerable

<sup>1</sup> The major demands reflecting popular aspirations in India and published by Gandhi at the end of January 1930 were to reduce land tax by 50 per cent, to revoke the government salt monopoly and the tax on salt, to grant Indian citizens the right to bear arms for self-defence and to liberate political prisoners.

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Otto Kuusinen thought it necessary to emphasise that those who believed that India had no Communist Party at all were wrong.

importance for overcoming the crisis within the Party. This document put before Indian Communists the demand swiftly to stop the factional struggle and to set up central leading agencies of the Party.<sup>1</sup> The ECCI oriented Indian Communists on stimulating work within the national-reformist trade unions; at that time the Comintern had come to the conclusion that it was necessary for Communists to launch an energetic activity in uniting red trade unions with the unions under INC influence. At the same time, the Comintern underlined that Communists should continue to expose national-reformists. In itself this proposition was by no means "left-wing". The leftist coating was expressed otherwise; it was thought that national-reformism had entered a crisis from which it was not likely to recover, and the most dangerous national-reformists were those who stood on the left flank. Events did not bear out that viewpoint, which resulted from an insufficiently realistic assessment of the situation. If a revolutionary situation was taking shape in the country, if national-reformism really was in a state of crisis and decay, if there really were enough objective prerequisites for the working class to come to power then, of course, left national-reformism, which had the support of the radicalised ordinary people, was bound to be seen by Communists as their direct rival and enemy, the last bastion of reformism and, therefore, the last bastion of British possessions in India. In fact things were quite different.

In the autumn of 1934 the Comintern sent the Communist Party of India a fresh letter expressing the idea of flexible and sensible tactics of a united front. The Indian National Congress, the letter said, was continuing to act before the people as a centre organising general national opposition to imperialism. It was leading considerable numbers of workers, wide sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry. However, the INC was pursuing a collaborationist policy in relation to imperialism; at the same time it was experiencing popular pressure upon it. Hence the political struggle within the Congress.

In 1934 the Comintern Executive was steadily coming to the conclusion that the INC should be regarded as a colourful mixture of diverse political forces. The documents, decisions, theoretical analysis and practical activity of the Comintern

<sup>1</sup> That was done in 1933-1934.

in the period of political change which had started in 1934 show that there is a complex combination of elements of old and new tactics. Such a combination found expression in the letter sent by the Comintern Executive to the Communist Party of India in the autumn of 1934. On the one hand, the letter regarded the stepping up of Congress activity against colonial rule as a political manoeuvre. On the other, it felt that the gravest danger for the Communist Party of India was to separate the struggle against national-reformism from that of national liberation, from the fight for everyday demands of the workers and peasants.

Meanwhile, the Comintern noted, that separation did exist in the Party's practical activity. It drew attention to the impermissibility of attempts to counterpose "the general and direct calls for anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution under proletarian hegemony" to the mass anti-imperialist movement developing under Congress leadership. Arriving at the conclusion that sectarianism was the most serious drawback of the communist movement in India, the Comintern summoned Communists resolutely to turn to the people and to "be able to find a common tongue with the mass of workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie who had not yet shaken free of national reformism but were coming to it through innumerable vacillations, retreats and zigzags". The Comintern recommended the Communist Party of India to accept the tactics of uniting all forces both in the fight against imperialism and the onslaught of capital, and in the fight against the landowners and usurers. These tactics should become, the letter said, a means of struggle for the proletariat's leading and organising role in the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution. At that time the Comintern had not yet posed the question of an alliance between the Communist Party of India and the Indian National Congress or of the entry of Communists into the INC; but even then it was proposing to examine the Congress organisations as a legal opportunity for setting up a wide militant anti-imperialist front and for winning the people to the CPI's side. In that connection, it recommended to the Provisional Central Committee of the Communist Party of India and to its local committees to propose (through communist sections) to left-wing trade unions and anti-imperialist organisations close to the Communists to join local Congress organisations through collective membership and to send their representatives to its bodies, without setting any preconditions save concerted struggle against imperialism. "The minimum

platform of united front in the anti-imperialist struggle", as one section of the letter put it, recommended the following: complete independence of India, revoking of all anti-democratic and anti-worker laws, freedom for political prisoners, fight against any reduction in wages and the sacking of workers, against the seizure of peasant lands for debts. The "minimum platform", however, included also a categorical demand "to stop all talks with British imperialism".

On the initiative of the Comintern Eastern Secretariat the CPI Provisional Central Committee, through the revolutionary Girmi Kamgar trade union, suggested uniting all textile workers unions on the basis of a general action against lower wages and for securing trade union democracy. It recommended also the All-India Executive Committee of the Red Trade Union Congress to propose to the Executive Committee of the national-reformist congress a merger of both union centres. That recommendation was accepted and the union centres merged in April 1935.

Decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress were of exceptional importance for promoting the communist movement in India, orienting the Party on a policy of a united anti-imperialist front.

We may recall that back in late 1929 the Indian National Congress had announced its aim of complete independence for India. After the British regime had refused to make any concessions to the Congress, Gandhi had begun to carry out a civil disobedience programme. In March 1930 there began a demonstrative violation of the law on government salt monopoly (without permission people began to make their own salt). A wave of popular protest demonstrations rolled over the country in April and May. People picketed shops selling British goods, Indian civil servants refused to do their duty and business life came to a standstill in the cities. Workers, peasants, merchants and office employees all took part in the campaign. The 1930-1931 civil disobedience campaign gained support among wide sections of the people and went beyond non-violent resistance. In many parts of India uprisings broke out and were put down by the colonialists by force of arms. The cruel repression even extended to those taking part in peaceful actions.

In the situation of subsequent decline in the national liberation movement, right-wing elements in the INC, fearing revolutionary popular activity, made a deal with the colonialists. The Communists being persecuted by the authorities and

having worked in the most difficult conditions, and up to 1933 having been deprived of central leadership, experienced an understandable distrust of the influential group of right-wing collaborationist Congressmen and had often transferred that distrust to left-wingers in the INC who had stood for the active anti-imperialist movement. Experience of many years of onerous and stubborn struggle, however, testified to the fact that the INC was politically heterogeneous, that its movement rightwards was not an irreversible process and that the direct task of Communists was to support the widening influence of left Congressmen among the people, encouraging their shift to more resolute anti-imperialist actions. Left Congressmen on the whole rejected the new law prepared by the colonialists for India, envisaging perpetuation of colonial rule and named the "servile constitution" by the Indian patriots. They called for a Constituent Assembly, supported by the people. In 1934 a new party was set up—the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), which joined the INC and formed its left wing. Between 1934 and 1935 the fight for trade union unity of the working class achieved some serious success, and the peasant movement came alive. Mass worker and peasant organisations endeavoured to join the National Congress as its collective members and have a decisive effect on its policy. The INC right wing stood opposed to that. In such a situation the historic decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress opened up broad prospects for Indian Communists.

Prominent Indian Communist S.G. Sardesai showed in his work *Seventh Congress of the Comintern and India's Struggle for Democracy and Freedom* what enormous importance the Seventh Congress condemnation of dogmatism and sectarianism had for the communist movement of India. What was of exceptional importance for the Communist Party of India was the Seventh Congress's advocacy of an anti-imperialist front in the colonies and semi-colonies. Sardesai wrote that as a consequence of sectarian mistakes the Communist Party of India had isolated itself from the mass anti-imperialist upsurge in India at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s. There had also been a mistaken assessment of the role of the national bourgeoisie in the liberation movement, and it was reckoned that the INC national-bourgeois leadership had no intention of heading the national movement, but would decapitate it and betray it to imperialism. Of course, Sardesai explained, the bourgeoisie was not keen on revolutionary struggle. But there was a vitally important distinction between

the policy of the bourgeoisie striving to take control of the mass anti-imperialist movement and a reactionary pro-imperialist policy. The conflict between the national bourgeoisie and imperialism really did exist. The bourgeoisie was interested in Indian independence. Indian Communists, wrote Sardesai, should have seen that the national-bourgeois leadership enjoyed enormous influence among the people; the INC was the most influential anti-imperialist mass organisation in the country and was attracting millions of fighters for freedom. At the same time, he noted, the communist and national movements in India in the late 1920s and early 1930s did not supplement, but rivalled one another. Sardesai stressed that the Seventh Comintern Congress was of great merit to the Indian communist movement; it firmly and resolutely oriented Indian Communists on the road that up till then they had only been groping for.<sup>1</sup>

On 11 February 1936 the Comintern Secretariat adopted a resolution "Proposals on the Indian Question", which was a further elaboration and concrete expression of the Seventh Congress decisions. It was preceded by a profound study of the socio-political situation in India and of the experience of the Communist Party of India.

The proposals set before Communists put forward the task of showing initiative and stepping up the struggle to establish a broad popular anti-imperialist front. This front, the document said, should be set up through the struggle against the colonialist-imposed "servile constitution", for India's independence, for the immediate implementation of urgent demands of the working people, so that the anti-imperialist popular front would be a front of action. Communists were recommended to join the INC, fight for the strengthening within it of the left wing, establish a united front with the Congress Socialist Party, support those of its proposals which met the people's vital interests. The resolution emphasised that that policy did not mean neglecting or weakening the ideological struggle and did not preclude a businesslike, specific criticism of reformism. In the opinion of the Secretariat, the main objective of Indian Communists was to get the INC to pursue a consistent struggle against British imperialism and do all to hamper any alliance between the INC and reactionary groups.

<sup>1</sup> See: S. G. Sardesai, *Seventh Congress of the Comintern and India's Struggle for Democracy and Freedom*, New Delhi, 1966.

Communists were recommended to advocate the calling of an All-India Constituent Assembly by universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot, to oppose it to the draft "servile constitution" and to explain that a genuine Constituent Assembly could only result from a broad popular movement.

The ECCI Secretariat, in drawing up this document of exceptional importance for the Communist Party of India, felt that the Party "had to be reshaped so as all its members could conduct daily persistent work in existing mass organisations and energetically take part in the popular struggle for the people's concrete needs and political rights". The Secretariat based itself on the notion that recognition of proletarian hegemony by a particular anti-imperialist contingent was certainly not a condition of "accepting" that contingent into the national anti-imperialist front; on the contrary, that recognition resulted from the persistent, dogged, consistent struggle of the Communist Party for the working people's everyday political and economic needs, for national liberation—a struggle being conducted within the framework of a united front. That conclusion fully accorded with Lenin's propositions on the national-colonial issue.

The Secretariat drew the attention of Indian Communists to the need for every possible combination of legal and illegal forms of struggle. It advised them to follow the example of the heroic struggle of the people of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) against Italian fascism and to "show the widest possible sections of the working people how they could and should fight and defend themselves".

The Comintern tried to focus the efforts of Indian Communists on the anti-imperialist struggle, on setting up and consolidating a united national front. The document "Proposals on the Indian Question" played an important part not only in strengthening the positions of the relatively small Communist Party of India, but also in promoting the mass liberation movement of the Indian people.

The major recommendations of the Comintern to Indian Communists found reflection also in the articles, written on its instructions, by the British Communists Ben Bradley and R. Palme Dutt in March 1936. They wrote, in part, "...there can be unity of the overwhelming majority of the population against imperialism, i.e., of all the popular masses who suffer under imperialist rule, and of all the elements from other classes who are prepared to join in the common struggle for national liberation". They went on to say: "The National

Congress has undoubtedly achieved a gigantic task in uniting wide forces of the Indian people for the national struggle, and remains today the principal existing mass organisation of many diverse elements seeking national liberation."<sup>1</sup> At the same time they indicated that the working class was destined to play the vanguard role in the anti-imperialist struggle.

After the political turn by the Comintern which was expressed in the decisions of its Seventh Congress, the leaders of the Communist Party of India began to strengthen contacts with leaders of the INC left wing. In particular, prominent Communist P. C. Joshi had talks with Nehru in February 1936. Nehru expressed his readiness to force right-wingers to leave the National Congress, and at the same time to ensure unity of the left and centre. He promised to back the proposal to unite trade unions, and also agreed to introduce union representatives into Congress leading agencies and to give them freedom to express their specific demands and views on a common Congress pre-election programme. It was assumed that left-wing elements of the Congress, including union representatives, would be included in the list of candidates drawn up by the Congress for the coming elections. What is more, Nehru promised to take up a favourable position in regard to the role and propaganda of Communists within the Congress. At the same time, Nehru had no wish to express his favourable attitude to Communists in an open and clear-cut form. On the whole he inclined towards a united front with Communists, but displayed circumspection.

The idea of cooperating with left Congressmen for the sake of establishing a broad anti-imperialist front was put forward primarily by Indian Communists themselves, who have come by the time through a substantial and difficult schooling of political struggle. The need for such a policy stemmed from life itself, the situation in India. At the same time, it was not difficult to see in the actions of the CPI leadership also a reflection of Comintern policy in regard to the liberation movement in the East, a policy that it had drawn up as a result of summarising the experience of the international communist movement, experience accumulated since the Second Comintern Congress. Two years later, representative of the Communist Party of the U.S.A. James Allen was to discuss with President of autonomous Philippines Manuel Quezon questions similar to those that Joshi and Nehru had

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, No. 11, 29 February 1936, pp. 297-98.



discussed in 1936, particularly that of a possible cooperation between Communists and progressives of the Nationalist Party.

Following Comintern recommendations, Indian Communists sharply stepped up their fight for the unity of the labour movement, for launching anti-imperialist and anti-feudal peasant actions, for consolidating the INC left wing, for getting mass associations of working people to join the National Congress and for converting it thereby into an organisation of a united national front, for the ideological and organisational strengthening of the Communist Party. The Comintern brought Lenin's behest to the Indian communist movement: "Indian Communists are duty-bound to support the bourgeois-democratic movement, but not to merge with it."<sup>1</sup>

Communists urged mass organisations to join the INC, especially the Kisan Sabha (peasant alliances) and the trade unions. This did not mean submitting them to national-bourgeois forces; the aim was to put left-wing pressure on the Congress leadership. It is hardly fortuitous that right-wing INC figures objected to those organisations joining the Congress. Simultaneously Communists fought to unite the national movement and to fortify the positions of the proletariat within the united front. The results of that policy were favourable both for the Communist Party of India and for the national liberation movement in which it was taking a most vigorous part. In 1936, the Communist Party and the Congress Socialist Party concluded an agreement on cooperation in the anti-imperialist struggle. Communists won the right to enter the CSP, while the CSP supported the communist idea of the mass organisations of workers and peasants entering the INC. At the end of 1936, some CSP members advocated the setting up of a joint party. The Communists felt it then feasible as a matter of principle, but, naturally, only on the basis of Marxism-Leninism. The merger did not take place; right-wing CSP leaders condemned the plans. But thousands of revolutionaries who had been members of the CSP then joined the Communist Party.

The mass organisations of working people more and more frequently were organising independent political actions. For example, workers organised successful strikes to win the liberation of political prisoners and revoke anti-worker legislation by Congress governments in various provinces. Communists,

<sup>1</sup> *Vestnik 2-ogo Kongressa Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala*, No. 1, 27 July 1920.

after re-uniting the trade union movement, had acquired considerable influence in the All-India Trade Union Congress, and that enabled them to take an active part in drawing up the charter of workers' demands which expressed general national interests. It contained demands for a Constituent Assembly, complete independence, as well as anti-feudal slogans. The labour movement in India before the war was developing under the impact of the ever increasing influence of the Communist Party of India. Communists and revolutionary democrats who were orienting the Indian peasants on an anti-feudal revolution had obtained overwhelming influence by the late 1930s in the joint peasant organisation set up in 1936 and had squeezed out the reformists in some considerable measure. Communists sought to make the workers and peasants of India conscious of the community of their class interests. The united front policy had brought, therefore, two interconnected results: strengthening of the Communist Party of India, extension of its influence, and sharp intensification of the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle of the common people.

### 3. COMINTERN AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDOCHINA

After World War I the process of formation of a working class in Indochina and especially in its most developed part, Vietnam, was accelerated. The French firms in Indochina had over 200,000 workers by 1929. A local bourgeoisie had taken shape, but its development was being held back by French capital; the sphere of its activity remained mainly trade and small production. The local feudals were the prop for French colonialism.

The October Revolution in Russia stimulated the rise in the national liberation movement of the peoples of Indochina. Its ideas were taken up by revolutionary Vietnamese emigres in France who grouped around the young Vietnamese Marxist Nguen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh). He had taken part in setting up the French Communist Party at its congress in Tours in 1920, had joined it and organised the illegal dispatch into Indochina of the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and documents and materials of the French Communist Party and the Comintern.

The General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Le Duan, writes: "The October