

## THE ORIGIN OF THE INDIAN COMMUNIST MOVEMENT AND THE COMINTERN'S ORIENTAL POLICY (1918-1921)

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The subject of the Indian revolutionaries in exile and the emergence of the Indian communist movement in the Land of Soviets<sup>1</sup> is treated superficially, if at all, in a host of books on the Comintern's general history, written by bourgeois and social-reformist authors. We shall, therefore, turn our attention to those books by bourgeois writers which, although eschewing special study of the subject of interest to us, still give it a more or less detailed treatment. These are the works about the history of the communist movement in India, the relationship between international communism and Indian nationalism, books about the contacts between the Bolsheviki and Indian Communists, as well as works on Soviet-British relations. The relevant general theoretical and political issues, dealt with in these books, are still an object of a pitched ideological battle.

Considering the activities of the Indian revolutionaries in Soviet Russia, bourgeois historians play down in every way, or altogether deny the international importance of the October Revolution and, in particular, its immense effect on India. They view the Caliphate exodus from India in 1920 as nothing short of a religious movement, trying to prove that the communist movement had no national ground to stand on in India; the Soviet policy and the Comintern's advocacy of all-round support for the national

<sup>1</sup> For details see: M. A. Persits, *Op. cit.*

liberation movement in the colonial and dependent countries are seen as purely self-seeking ambitions pursued in the national interests of Soviet Russia and for the selfish ends of international communism; they claim that the policies of the Bolsheviks and the Comintern towards India and other countries of the East implied exporting revolution.

These presumptions, advanced by modern-day bourgeois historians, figured mostly in the stock-in-trade of anti-Sovietism back in the early 1920s, soon after the founding of the Comintern, and earlier still—right after the October Revolution. This is not difficult to see by reading, at least, the work of American historian Leo Pasvolksy *Russia in the Far East*, published in January 1922,<sup>1</sup> or the memoirs of a British Intelligence agent in Central Asia, P. T. Etherton, who conducted intense anti-Soviet activities over there.<sup>2</sup> The same is evidenced by numerous comments in *The Times* of London which quite often carried primitive anti-Soviet fakes. It would be wrong to claim, however, that the present works by bourgeois historians do no more than rehash the conclusions and assertions of their predecessors. In contradistinction to them, most of present-day bourgeois historians, referring in one way or another to the subject of interest to us, usually write in an objectivist manner, drawing upon copious factual material so that their books and articles appear authentic and impartial at first glance. Some of the authors make a special point of advising the readers about the absolute objectivity of their writings. For example, American historians Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, who wrote a large book about the communist movement in India,<sup>3</sup> although declaring quite openly, through an epigraph, the anti-communist thrust of their work, assure, however, that it is for that very reason that they intended to tell the truth because it alone could force communism to quit the historical scene.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: Leo Pasvolksy, *Russia in the Far East*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> See: P. T. Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia*, Constable and Company, Ltd., London, 1925.

<sup>3</sup> See: Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1959.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XI.

Other writers express their commitment to the “truth” by declaring themselves to be the partisans of a pure, un-commented fact in a historical narration. For example, the American historian of an Indian descent, Chattar Singh Samra, declared in his book about Anglo-Soviet relations<sup>1</sup> that he had reduced his commentary to the minimum because “the language of facts is ... much more adequate and eloquent in striking home inexorable realities than their exhaustive commentaries”.<sup>2</sup>

In reality, however, so promising a statement proved to be without foundation in fact since the author, as he admitted himself, was using primarily British sources and, among them, most often the publications in *The Times*. Now, the measure of that paper’s objectivity was determined by its understandable urge to vindicate by all means the anti-Soviet armed intervention of British imperialism and its generous support for the Whiteguards and *basmach* bands.

But, in addition to a biased selection of sources, C. S. Samra, like so many of his colleagues, juggles with facts as much as he likes and ranges them so as to prompt the reader to draw the conclusions of interest to the ruling classes of the capitalist countries. So, the lip-service to “nothing but the truth” and to “objective” facts does not make the works under review any more objective.

#### IMPACT OF THE GREAT OCTOBER REVOLUTION ON INDIA

The impact of the Great October Revolution on the countries of the East and, notably, on India was so strong and manifold that it is still attracting many researchers who, provided they are objective enough, discover more and more aspects of this impact and the reasons it offers to explain various positive developments in social life, both past and present. The Great October Revolution had the effect of radicalising the Indian national liberation

<sup>1</sup> See: Chattar Singh Samra, *India and Anglo-Soviet Relations (1917-1947)*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, Calcutta, New Delhi, Madras, 1959.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. X.

movement which eventually developed into a decisive battle for the country's total political independence. The national leaders of India arrived, above all under the influence of the October Revolution, at a better understanding of the role of the masses in the struggle for liberation and started drawing them in the national movement against the British colonialists. The example of the victory of the Russian workers and peasants made for better organisation of the Indian proletarian and peasant movements. This was to be seen, notably, in the creation of mass trade union federations of workers and militant organisations of the peasantry, as well as in a far more extensive involvement of peasants and workers in the political struggle for the country's independence than ever before.

Finally, the impact of the October Revolution had most directly showed itself in the emergence of the Indian communist movement and in the adoption of the principles of Marxism-Leninism by many national revolutionaries.

Bourgeois writers, faced by the objective state of things, more often than not have to recognise, directly or indirectly, the impact of the October Revolution on India. Of the relatively recent publications, one may note an interesting work by Indian historian Zafar Imam. Highly estimating the effect of the Great October Revolution on India, he still holds unobjective positions on a number of issues. In his book on Soviet policy towards India and Anglo-Soviet relations, as well as in a number of articles,<sup>1</sup> Zafar Imam summed up Indian public comments on the Great October Revolution and cited, in particular, a multitude of utterances by the then Indian newspapers and magazines of different affiliations, ranging from nationalist to governmental, which made it clear that the Russian events of November 1917 had aroused enormous interest in India, notably among Indian patriots. In particular, the *Bombay Chronicle* of January 11, 1918 wrote: "If Lenin is successful, the February revolution will sink into insig-

<sup>1</sup> See: Zafar Imam, *Colonialism in East-West Relations. A Study of Soviet Policy Towards India and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1947*, Eastman Publications, New Delhi, 1969; *Idem*, "The October Revolution and India", *Narody Azii i Afriki*, No. 4, 1964; *Idem*, "Effects of Russian Revolution on India, 1919-1920", *Mainstream*, November 18, 1967.

nificance before the November revolution, for its success is nothing less than the end of the upper middle class and the final triumph of the common people."<sup>1</sup> In its issue of September 2, 1919, the Allahabad newspaper *Independent* pointed out that the struggle between the new ideas of Bolshevism and the cruel world of the established order threatens to be long and bloody, but Bolshevism cannot be vanquished. It will hold out, survive, thrive and eventually prevail. Zafar Imam quoted numerous facts showing the rising affection of India's national revolutionary forces for the Land of Soviets and the great fear which overwhelmed the British ruling circles as they saw knowledge about the October Revolution and Soviet Russia spread through India.

That fear of British colonialists was a fine illustration of the tremendous revolutionising effect of the October Revolution on Indian society. In November 1917 the Indian National Congress was still demanding nothing beyond home rule for India, while the British ruling circles had already understood what that could lead to because of the growing influence of the Russian events. That is why they launched a wide-scale campaign in the press to scare the Indian national bourgeoisie by a possibility of something like Russian dislocation and anarchy which, they claimed, had been due to the power take-over by a people which was not yet ripe for it. The *Pioneer* newspaper wrote in its issue of November 19, 1917: "Russia at present is providing the world with an object lesson of the dangers attending the premature acquisition of representative institutions before a country is fitted for them. Home rule in Russia has virtually been synonymous with no rule.... The moral is obvious and should be taken to heart by all impatient politicians in this country. Self-government... is a plant of slow growth and any attempt to force it prematurely can only result in misrule, turmoil and anarchy."<sup>2</sup>

Proceeding from his anti-communist stand in interpreting Soviet-British relations, C. S. Samra had to acknowledge, nevertheless, the immense force of the ideological impact of the October Revolution on India. Soviet Russia, he

<sup>1</sup> *Mainstream*, November 18, 1967, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from: *Mainstream*, November 18, 1967, p. 12.

wrote, her "Communist principles and practice ... became primarily an ideological threat which was far more destructive to the *status quo* [of the British Empire—*Auth.*] than Tsarist arms had been".<sup>1</sup>

The pamphlet by the Indian Trotskyite, Saumyendra-nath Tagore, about the development of the communist movement in India altogether denies the serious influence of the October Revolution on the Indian people and asserts that the Russian Revolution had only aroused the "curiosity" of the Indian people but "made no impact on them".<sup>2</sup> Present-day bourgeois historians, although they draw roughly the same conclusions, produce far more subtle arguments in a bid to justify them. One case in point is a book by Indian historian Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, Reader in International Relations at Jadavpur University, extolling Indian nationalism and declaring communism to be an utterly foreign science unacceptable to India. Bandyopadhyaya claims that "inside India ... the Russian Revolution and the persistent propaganda by the Soviet Government and the Comintern did not produce anything more than a ripple".<sup>3</sup> In what way, however, is this argument motivated?

The first thing the author of this work refers to is the Caliphate exodus from India when thousands of Indians set off for neighbouring Muslim countries to begin, with their help, a guerrilla war against British imperialism. That campaign arose in May 1920 in protest against the imperialist partition of Turkey and against the Entente holding captive the Turkish Sultan—Caliph of all the true believers.<sup>4</sup>

Although the author did trace the course of events during the exodus campaign, pointing out, in particular, that one rather small group of its participants, *muhajirs*,<sup>5</sup> had wanted to go to Anatolia to Kemalists in order to join them

<sup>1</sup> Chattar Singh Samra, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from: Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Indian Nationalism Versus International Communism. Role of Ideology in International Politics*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1966, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> From 18,000 to 50,000 Indians left for Afghanistan at the time (according to unconfirmed estimates).

<sup>5</sup> *Muhajirs*—Muslim pilgrims who participated in the exodus from India.

in fighting British imperialism, while another group went to Tashkent to join the Bolsheviks, yet he explained the latter group's intention as a casual, rather than motivated, circumstance. Bandyopadhyaya eschewed analysing the motley composition of the *muhajirs* and their different political aspirations, and for that reason all he saw in the exodus campaign was a religious movement of Muslim fanatics in defence of the Caliph. He writes that the first batch of the Indians coming to Russia "consisted entirely of *Hizrati* Muslims who had left British India because they did not want to live under the British who were responsible for violating the legitimate rights of Turkey and other Muslim countries after World War I. Many of them wanted to go to Turkey and fight with the Turks against the British for saving the Khalifat."<sup>1</sup> Yet even the fact that most of the *muhajirs* who had entered Soviet Russia stayed there did not embarrass the author as he alleged it to have happened because of Roy's activities rather than at the will of the people involved in the exodus.

The wrong premise led to the wrong inference that the October Revolution and the communist ideas behind it had principally influenced the most ignorant, backward and fanatical sections of Indian society, that is, the Muslim minority. Bandyopadhyaya writes: "Some sections of Indian Muslims seem to have been profoundly impressed by the nature and objectives of the Revolution soon after it had taken place."<sup>2</sup> As to the Indians, there were few of them, in the author's opinion, who supported the communist ideas. "Apart from the *Hizrati* Muslims," he claims, "the Indians who were most attracted to Communism and the Soviet Union during this period seem to have been some of the Indian revolutionaries and students who had gone abroad." Furthermore, Bandyopadhyaya points out that the important ones among these people "either never come to India, or came only when they were no longer Communists".<sup>3</sup> That was supposed to justify the argument that not only had the October Revolution produced but a slight influence on India, but that the seeds of communism had found no soil there to germinate in.

<sup>1</sup> Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Some other bourgeois writers have given about just as narrow-minded an assessment of the exodus movement. For example, American historian John Patrick Haithcox maintains in his book *Communism and Nationalism in India* that the mass exodus from India had been "in protest against the dismemberment of Turkey by Great Britain and her allies following World War I.... The harsh terms of the treaty imposed on Turkey were interpreted by many Moslems as a threat to Islam itself."<sup>1</sup> C. S. Samra had this to say about the popular exodus movement: "The reaction in India to the Sèvres terms was one of hostility and anger toward the British Government. Extremist Muslims were so inflamed at the treaty that they decided on *hijrat* (migration from one country to another for religious reasons)."<sup>2</sup> Another American historian, David N. Druhe, although he did not consider the exodus movement and the composition of Indian exiles in Soviet Russia, still found it right and proper to declare that even those Indians who attended the First Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku in September 1920 were "imbued ... only with the desire to support the Caliphate".<sup>3</sup> Now, Zafar Imam, who gave a fairly impartial assessment of the impact of the October Revolution on India, described the Indians who had arrived in Tashkent and then in Moscow as follows: "All of them were Muslims and their hostility towards British rule in India was based mainly on religious grounds."<sup>4</sup> The said bourgeois historians in their assessments of the exodus campaign laid emphasis on the religious form of the movement and saw the injured religious sentiment as its mainspring.

It is obvious, nevertheless, that the exodus movement had been, in point of fact, a case of political action mostly of petty-bourgeois Muslim masses against the British colonialists to obtain their country's liberation. Moreover, those involved in that movement were determined to

<sup>1</sup> John Patrick Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*. M. N. Roy and Comintern Policy 1920-1939, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Chattar Singh Samra, *Op.cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> David N. Druhe, *Soviet Russia and Indian Communism*. 1917-1947, Bookman Associates, New York, 1959, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Zafar Imam, *Op. cit.*, p. 118.

fight for these aims. The issue of the Caliphate was the excuse rather than the true reason behind the exodus from India. Even British colonialists had to acknowledge the political anti-colonialist character of the exodus movement, although they did so in a trivially anti-Soviet manner. The *Oud* newspaper carried an article "The Intrigues of Bolsheviks in India", which said: "The *Hijrat* movement, which was considered purely religious, turned out to be political in actual fact.... A knowledgeable person must agree with us when we say that the *Hijrat* movement was not based on religious doctrines but had been brought about by the spread of Russian propaganda."

The sum and substance of the entire Caliphate movement of 1919-1922 was expressed clearly enough by its leading ideologue and the leader of the Muslim community in India Mohammad Ali. In September 1920, following an abortive tour of the Entente countries by a Caliphate delegation he led to protest at the Treaty of Sèvres, he declared that to him "the struggle for liberation of India mattered far more than the issue of injustices inflicted on the Caliphate. The injured religious feeling of Indian Muslims will be relieved only when India will be in the hands of the Indians."<sup>1</sup>

That was obviously the line of reasoning not only of Mohammad Ali but of a multitude of Muslims and Indians involved in the liberation struggle. It is the anti-British liberation character of the exodus movement, although that was, above all, an act by Muslim masses, that induced a great number of young Indian non-Muslim patriots to join it. This was communicated by one of the participants in the exodus movement, who was later to become a prominent communist leader of India, Shaukat Usmani. "The mass exodus that started in the month of May 1920 to Afghanistan," he writes in his memoirs, "was not confined to the Muslims alone. Many Hindu youths also utilised this opportunity and taking Muslim names crossed into Afghanistan and then into the Soviet Union."<sup>2</sup> The exodus movement was part of the pan-Indian national liberation struggle and had the aim of stepping it up and turning it into determined armed action. "The idea of the Indians

<sup>1</sup> *Civil and Military Gazette*, October 9, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> Shaukat Usmani, "Russian Revolution and India", *Mainstream*, July 1, 1967, p. 14.

leaving for Afghanistan," Shaukat Usmani goes on to say, "was to obtain military aid and arms from Afghanistan and then ... to start a sort of guerrilla warfare" against British imperialism.

The pan-Indian character of the exodus movement showed itself most in the fact that many of its participants, bearing the religious flag of the *Hijra*, wanted to cross not so much into Afghanistan or Turkey as into the Land of Soviets. They looked to the victorious workers and peasants of Soviet Russia, first and foremost, for practical support in their struggle against colonialists and for some experience of a revolutionary solution of the urgent problems before their own country. Shaukat Usmani writes: "It will not be an exaggeration to say that a considerable majority of the people who had crossed into Afghanistan had linked their hopes with Soviet Russia much earlier than they left their homes."<sup>1</sup>

However, the Afghan Government, yielding to pressure from Britain, banned the emigrants from free movement northward. Only two batches of bare 80 each, and a small number of other Indians,<sup>2</sup> not to count isolated individuals who acted on their own, were allowed to cross into Soviet territory in 1920. Those who wanted to do so proved to be far more numerous, however, and that is why a further, third batch was formed soon afterwards. But when it tried to move northward, it was confronted with armed resistance by the Afghan authorities.<sup>3</sup> According to reports of April 27, 1921, coming from Chardzhou, the Afghans arrested 500 Indian immigrants in Mazar-i-Sharif who were on their way to Russia and kept them in Khanabad. Besides, 150 Indian immigrants who also wanted to get into Russia were arrested in Herat. The Soviet consul pressed for their release, but failed to obtain it.<sup>4</sup> Considering the situation as it had developed, one may assume that the Afghan authorities intervened even in the very

<sup>1</sup> Shaukat Usmani, *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> For example, 28-30 Indians—members of the Indian Revolutionary Association, arrived in Tashkent from Kabul on July 1, 1920, that is, before the *muhajirs* who arrived there as late as October or November of the same year.

<sup>3</sup> *Mainstream*, July 1, 1967, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> See: M. A. Persits, *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

process of making up groups going to Afghanistan. The Emir's officials did all they could for those groups to be formed predominantly of individuals eventually striving to go to Turkey rather than to the Land of the Bolsheviks.

Nevertheless, the greater part of the *muhajirs* who had left Afghanistan stayed in Soviet Russia. The minority, having asked for and obtained aid from the Soviet authorities, proceeded through the territory of revolutionary Russia to Turkey where, incidentally, they were even not admitted and had to go back.

That means that what emerged within the framework of the Caliphate exodus campaign was a fundamentally new social phenomenon—a deliberate emigrant movement of hundreds of Indian national revolutionaries into the land of the October Revolution, who were then linking their own struggle for their country's liberation with the idea of an alliance with Soviet Russia. Some of the *muhajirs* themselves described the motives behind their hard and dangerous trek into the Land of Soviets. A total of 84 questionnaires, filled in by Indians on their arrival in Tashkent, have come down to us.<sup>1</sup> One of the questions asked was: "Why did you come to Russia?" Significantly enough, none of those questioned explained the reason for his arrival by his Muslim affiliation. Most of them (45) answered like this: "to serve Indian revolution", "to liberate India", "to fight Britain", "to serve India", "to serve my country". Another group, of 17, answered in this way: "to get aid from Russia", "to sue for help for Revolution", "to seek aid from the Soviet authorities", etc. Many of the emigrants demonstrated an understanding of Soviet government as a mighty factor for revolutionising the national liberation movement in India. Seven of them declared: we have come "to join the revolution", "to do revolutionary work", or, as the 20-year-old Shaukat Usmani replied, "to join the revolutionary movement". Five had a still clearer political orientation: they wanted "to enquire about Bolshevism", "to study revolution", or, as the 50-year-old Abdus Subhan said, "to draw a lesson from the Russian revolution", or, as the 42-year-old Subdar Khan wrote, "to study the Russian revolution and find a most useful way for the

<sup>1</sup> See: M. A. Persits, *Op. cit.*, pp. 70, 77.

Indian revolution". Eight Indians clearly established that they had come "to learn military and propaganda work". It follows that almost all Indian emigres had a fairly high level of national awareness; they were inspired with the idea of liberating their country and believed that they would be able to carry out their patriotic plans best of all with assistance from Soviet Russia.

Some of the emigres were people who had already realised that their slogans of national liberation were far too limited and began to reflect on the social objectives of the struggle. It is in that context that they pondered over the Russian Revolution and the social system it had brought about. Three or four of those who answered the above-mentioned 84 questionnaires revealed their communist sympathies. Abdul Majid, a 23-year-old man from Kashmir, wrote down: "I heartily agree with the communist programme." Nisar Mohammad of Peshawar, of the same age, declared: "If the communist principles are honestly carried, the whole world will be free." He settled in the USSR and subsequently became Minister of Education of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic.

Abdul Qaiuum, a 22-year-old student of Punjab University, was an interesting personality. He announced that he accepted the Russian communist programme. It must be that while he was still studying at the University he began to learn the ideas of socialism under the influence of the Great October Revolution. Anxious to fight for his country's liberation, he had wanted to emigrate from India to the United States back in 1919 in order to join the Ghader Party. But he failed in this design, and joined a Caliphate organisation later that year. In March 1920 he was briefly detained for his anti-British activities. Soon after his release, on May 13, 1920, he, "on instructions from the Caliphate Revolutionary Council", left India, having joined the exodus campaign. The Caliphate Council's instructions met his secret and fondest desire to get into the Land of Soviets. He arrived in Kabul together with other *muhajirs* and from there he went to Soviet Turkestan with the very first batch. While still on their way to Tashkent, Abdul Qaiuum led a "communist trend" group in heated debates among his fellow travellers. In Tashkent he started independent studies of Marxism and early in

1921 ventured into writing a seven-chapter pamphlet "Indian Workers and Peasants" which he described as a "desk book". Setting out the sum and substance of the communist doctrine, he wrote that it called for "the overthrow of the power of imperialism and capitalism", because "labour produces everything while capital does nothing but robs labour". In conclusion he urged India's workers and peasants to follow the example of the Russian workers. He writes: "If you do not want to stay under the barbaric yoke ... of the capitalists, then rise and aid yourselves. You are 300 million, while only one-tenth of the Indians, if organised into an army, can conquer the world."<sup>1</sup> Abdul Qaiuum's pamphlet is an interesting sample of reflections of a young man who has just discovered the wisdom of Marxism and, carried away by it, wants to tell others how to achieve liberation from all forms of oppression.

From his party membership card, as a member of the Tashkent Indian communist group, we find that Abdul Qaiuum joined the communist group on April 11, 1921, that is, when he had just finished working on his pamphlet. That is why, answering the question in the party card, "What has made you join the Communist Party?", Abdul Qaiuum wrote: "A study of Marx and Engels." Subsequently, Abdul Qaiuum became a citizen of the USSR and played an active part in the process of socialist construction.

Shaukat Usmani also passed from nationalism to communism. His was also a typical case for Indian revolutionary youth who decided to commit themselves to the struggle to rid India from colonialism. "My hatred towards the British Raj," he wrote about himself in 1922, "was born with me. From the very time of my infancy I had cherished revolutionary ideas, and at the age of 12, had sworn to take vengeance. At the age of 19, I joined Mainpuri Conspiracy, a bare attempt to overthrow Britanism, in India. Traitor existed in the organisation. Some twenty of the members he knew, got them caught together with the ammunition store. Some were hanged, the others transported to Andamans for their whole life. It was early in 1919. Wild ideas still haunted my mind."

<sup>1</sup> See: M. A. Persits, *Op. cit.*, pp. 77, 78.

The young man looked hard for a way of liberating his country. When he learned about the October Revolution and the Soviets which had proclaimed their readiness to support the liberation struggle of oppressed peoples, he decided that it was in revolutionary Russia that he had to look for answers to the questions that agitated his mind. It was at that time that the exodus movement began and he, naturally, joined it. "I arranged with my colleagues to leave India for Afghanistan," Usmani writes, "and see if there was any prospect of conducting work from that place." Once in Afghanistan, however, the *muhajirs* soon understood that Kabul had dropped the idea of a stout battle against British imperialism. "Thence," Usmani communicated, "we started ... propaganda to come northwards, and I was one of the chief instigators." Usmani became a Communist in 1921 when he was attending the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow.

There was another noteworthy *muhajir*—a 20-year-old poet Habib Ahmed Wafa. On arriving in Tashkent, he enrolled at the Indian Military Courses where he directed amateur theatricals. He wrote a play under a significant title of "The Moon Russia" in which he spoke about the attractive light of the land of the October Revolution which had indicated the way for Indians to their liberation.<sup>1</sup> The play was a great hit. Later on, Wafa adopted Soviet citizenship and became a writer and scholar. His plays were put on in many Soviet theatres, and his poems were published. He headed the Indian Languages Chair at the Institute of Oriental Studies. So, quite obviously, the reason behind the arrival of *muhajirs* in Soviet Russia had been the social essence of Soviet government and its anti-colonial policies rather than their own Muslim affiliation.

Virtually disproving his own assertion that nobody but Muslims had been influenced by the October Revolution, Bandyopadhyaya tells an instructive story of an Indian by the name of Sibnath Banerjee. That man went to Kabul as a teacher in order to proceed from there to Germany for training as engineer. In Kabul he came across communist literature and succeeded in somewhat satisfying his interest

<sup>1</sup> The Central State Archive of the Soviet Army (CSASA), section 25025, register 1, file 11, p. 8; file 6, p. 3.

in socialism which had been aroused back in 1917 by newspaper reports about the October Revolution. After that Banerjee, together with another group of Indians, went to Soviet Russia (that was already in 1922) where he completed his studies at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East and became a Marxist, although he did not join the Communist Party of India.<sup>1</sup> Bandyopadhyaya claims that the only reason why that new batch of Indian Muslims left for Russia was because of the hostile attitude of the Afghan Government who refused them an asylum. But, evidently, the true reason was different. For one thing, the whole group, that is to say Banerjee too, could have returned to India and then the Indians would hardly have had any danger to face. Yet they did go to Soviet Russia which, from the standpoint of the British authorities, made them criminals right away. For another, Banerjee wanted to go to Germany but, instead, stayed in Russia for almost two years, having given up his long-cherished hope of obtaining a German engineer's diploma. In 1925 he returned to India to become one of the prominent leaders of the trade union movement.

An interesting lot was that of Ghulam Ahmed, an Indian, who must have been a *muhajir*. His case was reported by a British Intelligence informer, one Iovanovich. On April 22, 1922, Iovanovich talked to that Indian at the British Consulate Hospital in Meshhed where Ghulam Ahmed had been admitted because he fell ill on his way back to India from Russia. "I was greatly surprised," Iovanovich wrote, "when he said 'there is a very good Red Army in Russia, the best in the world: Russia is a free country'. He told me that he had been through the Indian propaganda courses at Tashkent and Moscow and was allowed absolute freedom while there.... He was chiefly enraptured with the freedom he received in Russia." Then the informer put a provocative question to him: "You of course do not want India to have such 'freedom' as is in Russia?" The cautious reply was: "We would be happy without the English." And after a moment's reflection, Ghulam Ahmed added: "Afterwards I will go back to Russia as Russia is a good place to be in." The informer asked why Ahmed did not attach the word

<sup>1</sup> See: Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, pp. 131-33.

“Khan” to his name. He replied: “I live in the Soviet fashion and recognise no prince—no Khan.”<sup>1</sup>

The story of Banerjee and, more particularly, that of the *muhajirs* themselves, and of those we came to know more or less about, makes it quite clear how great was the impact of the October Revolution on the outlook of ordinary Indians and on their choice of pursuit in life.

There were over 200 Indians in Soviet cities (as Moscow, Tashkent, Bukhara, Baku or Samarkand) late in 1920 and early in 1921. Many of them became Communists there and studied at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East and other educational and propaganda institutions. Back home, they became active in the communist, working-class and national liberation movements. Others, although they had not joined the Communist Party, drastically changed their views. They now had a different appreciation of the role of the working masses in the liberation struggle and strongly advocated action to win the basic social and economic demands of the working people of the town and countryside. Quite a few Indian revolutionaries stayed on in the Land of Soviets for the rest of their lives and played their full part in the process of socialist construction.

Representatives of oppressed peoples from all over the globe were coming to Soviet Russia: they wanted to see with their own eyes the land of the October Revolution which was translating into practice the great idea of the right of nations to self-determination and helping the oppressed peoples of the East in their struggle for independence and freedom. Thousands of citizens from Eastern countries, including those who had nothing to do with Islam, like Chinese or Koreans, fought, arms in hand, for Soviet Russia.

Ignoring all these circumstances and ascribing to the *muhajirs* the initiative in founding the Communist Party of India in Tashkent, Bandyopadhyaya set himself the aim of finding out the reason behind the Muslims' predilection for the ideas of communism. He writes: “This conversion of large numbers of Indian Muslims to Communism is

<sup>1</sup> National Archives of India. Foreign and Political Department, file 359-M 1923, No. 11, p. 22.

not a little surprising and certainly needs some investigation.” Referring to authorities on Islam, Bandyopadhyaya mentions the following three factors which influenced the Muslims in the communist sense: the Soviet Government's particularly friendly attitude to the Muslims both within its own borders and outside and the help the Bolsheviks gave to the Muslim countries; the proclamation by the Soviet government of the right of nations to self-determination and the enforcement of that principle in actual practice; the ideological community between Bolshevism and Islam.<sup>1</sup>

We go along with the first two points, barring a reservation. The Soviet Government's attitude to the oppressed peoples of the Muslim countries was just as friendly as its attitude to the peoples of non-Muslim countries. The general and major principles of the Soviet Government's foreign policy programme were enunciated in the Decree on Peace which proclaimed the equality of all nations, both large and small, and their right to self-determination. The struggle of the peoples to exercise this right was found to be logical and necessary.

And Bandyopadhyaya had enough reason to quote one of the leaders of the Caliphate movement, Hosain Kidwai: “The fact remains that at the start Bolshevism was welcomed by the masses everywhere because they expected an amelioration of their grievances.”<sup>2</sup> So, the facts Bandyopadhyaya cited disprove his own assertion that the October Revolution had but an insignificant effect on India.

Now, for the third point, that is what the author describes as the community between Islam and Bolshevism. Bandyopadhyaya mentions the following features of this community: the object of Bolshevism as well as of Islam is a world revolution; neither recognises any particular privileges in human society; both reject racial restrictions; both oppose capitalism, encourage labour, oppose big landowners, favour the brotherhood and equality of people, support the idea of internationalism, encourage knowledge and education, uphold the independence of women and, finally, stand for the abolition of private property. But one can just as well try to prove the ideological community

<sup>1</sup> See: Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, pp. 133-34.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

of Bolshevism not only with Islam but with any other religion. For each creed, including Buddhism and, particularly, Christianity, since they emerged as the movements of oppressed masses,<sup>1</sup> contained egalitarian elements in their early stages. However, that "egalitarianism" of theirs has nothing in common with Marx's scientific socialism.

Consequently, it is utterly impossible to speak of Islam being in any way exclusive in this sense, while the "evidence" cited to support this argument is so obviously unprovable as to spare us the trouble of a critical scrutiny. Our concern in this context is to find out why the author needed to speak about the ideological community of Islam and Bolshevism and what is the origin and meaning of this assertion.

The so-called ideological community of Islam and Bolshevism seems to be the author's principal argument in his theorising to justify his argument about the Muslims' predilection for or gravitation towards socialism and Soviet government. Only by invoking such a far-fetched community can one try to prove that the October Revolution had but an insignificant revolutionising effect on the Indian people. Bandyopadhyaya seems to tell his reader, essentially: "The October Revolution influenced only some sects of the Muslim population of India and even that because the Bolsheviks had proclaimed such principles of socialism which were already present in the Koran, and were the aspiration of all Muslims. But for that, the revolution could never have attracted the attention not only of the Indians but of all Orthodox Muslims either."

The claim about the ideological community of Islam and Bolshevism, based on the reference to the presence of socialist principles in the Koran, began to be most actively spread in the Muslim countries after the October Revolution. However, there was more than one reason behind the propagation of that kind of notion.

Some radical representatives of the petty-bourgeois Muslim intelligentsia, looking through the Koran for elements of egalitarianism and presenting them as genuinely socialist principles, wanted to inure the religious Muslim

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Zur Geschichte des Urchristentums". In: *Werke, Marx Engels*, Vol. 22, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1963, p. 449.

masses in that way to the idea of an alliance with the Land of Soviets in the name of a joint struggle against colonial oppression. They intended to oppose, in that way, too, the argument of reactionary propaganda that atheism and hostility towards the believers were the principal features of communism. That was the way the Koran was interpreted by many, notably, by Mohammad Barakatullah and Abdur Rabb, prominent leaders of Indian revolutionaries in exile in Soviet Russia. Barakatullah, for example, wrote in his article "Bolshevism and the Islamic Nations" that the socialist ideals of equality and brotherhood, proclaimed by Islam and other religions and expressed in the formula "desire for your neighbour what you desire for yourself" had become a reality in Russia. There, he wrote, "the administration of the extensive territories of Russia and Turkestan has been placed in the hands of labourers, cultivators and soldiers. Distinction of race, religion and nationality has disappeared. Equal rights to life and freedom are ensured to all classes of the nation. But the enemy of the Russian republic is British imperialism which holds Asiatic nations in a state of eternal thralldom." Barakatullah followed up that statement by an appeal to the oppressed peoples: "Time has come for the Mohammedans of the world and Asiatic nations to understand the noble principles of Russian socialism and to embrace it seriously and enthusiastically.... They should join Bolshevik troops in repelling attacks of usurpers and despots, the British."<sup>1</sup>

The original programme of the Indian Revolutionary Association, led by Abdur Rabb, had two points, almost one next to the other: 1) the Association shall defend the principles of communism and 2) the Association shall make nationalistic and religious propaganda among Indian border troops. Such ideas were circulated not only in India. Here are, for example, some excerpts from a characteristic document written by a member of the Arab Unity Committee, Abdul Qadir, on December 19, 1920 and passed on to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR G. V. Chicherin through the Soviet representative in Ankara S. Z. Eliava. The author of that message invoked

<sup>1</sup> *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol. I, Ed. by G. Adhikari, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1971, pp. 124, 126.

the ideological community of Bolshevism and Islam in trying to justify the expediency and possibility of Soviet Russia's alliance with the Arabs. The Soviet Government, the author asserted, applied the same principles as those proclaimed by the Koran.

In the section entitled "Islamic Religion and the Bolshevik Programme" Abdul Qadir wrote: "Islam is a straight way to freedom, equality and brotherhood, because a) the Islamic religion makes everybody equal; b) eradicates enmity, violence and despotism; c) establishes the rights of all humankind." And the author concludes: "*It is upon this doctrine that Bolshevism has arisen* [emphasis added— *Auth.*], for Bolshevism wreaks all its anger and all its wrath upon those who, under the guise of patronage, subjugate peoples.... Therefore agreement and alliance between Islam and Bolshevism are logical and natural. An alliance between the Bolsheviks and the Arabs will be a powerful and hard blow to the oppressors—the British, French and Italians...." Not content with this set of arguments, the author goes on to say: "The creeds and customs of Arabs have so much in common with Bolshevism that the struggle of the Arabs in close alliance and full contact with the Bolsheviks is quite possible and natural."

Let us note that this kind of reasoning could be seen in the early years following the October Revolution not only with regard to Islam but to Buddhism as well in the columns of Soviet newspapers published in the Muslim areas of the Soviet East. For example, the *Kommunist* of Baku carried a small article by Kubad Kasimov seeking to prove the necessity of Soviet aid to the peoples of the East and dismissing the misgivings that those peoples would not be able to instal a socialist order in their countries because of their backwardness. "Those who say so," he wrote, "forget that the customs, morals, habits and convictions ... of the peoples of the East are identical to the ideas of communism. One may take the dogmas of one of the world's ... religions—Buddhism, by way of example, which declare: the Buddhists must treat all humans without distinction with equal tolerance, condescension and fraternal love." He followed that up by proclaiming that the oppressed peoples of the East waited for their liberators, ready to rise to "carry into effect the ideas of commun-

ism ... which they have long been preaching".<sup>1</sup>

This socialist interpretation of Islam revealed the intention of some revolutionaries to find a way to the hearts of religious-minded masses and offer them the arguments they could accept in favour of cooperation with godless Soviet Russia, and in that sense it played a certain positive role. It is quite possible also that for some Muslim national revolutionaries such an interpretation of certain tenets of Islam served as a stimulant for getting acquainted with the true principles of scientific socialism and for a subsequent departure from religion.

Conversely, socialist interpretation of Islam reinforced the position both of Muslim religion itself and the exploiter classes which used it to oppose the pressure of the ideas of scientific socialism spreading far and wide under the influence of the October Revolution. The line of reasoning was roughly this: the priority in working out the ideas of socialism belongs to Islam; all that the Bolsheviks are doing is to repeat the postulates long since enunciated by the Koran; but instead of being grateful to the religious source which has given them the inspiration, they reject religion altogether. That was just what was required in order to prevent the mass of the faithful from coming into close contact with Bolshevism. In that way the socialist interpretation of Islam was to maintain the working people's religious community with their exploiters and kept the proletariat, which was still in the making, from passing on to a class-governed community and, thereby, from perceiving the ideas of scientific socialism.

It is the socialist interpretation of Islam that guided the majority of Indian revolutionary emigres who were in Soviet Turkestan. And, in all probability, the religious commitment of those people, their allegiance to Muslim faith obstructed, rather than facilitated, the conversion of emigres to Marxism and their accession to the first Indian communist group which was formed in Tashkent at the time.

An important contention in the series of arguments used by Bandyopadhyaya was that the Communist Party of India had been proclaimed in Tashkent following the demand

<sup>1</sup> *Kommunist*, Baku, June 2, 1920.

of the *muhajirs*—the participants in the Caliphate exodus movement—and consisted of them. Bandyopadhyaya writes: “These fanatically religious Muslims who went to Tashkent were met by M. N. Roy, joined the ‘India House’, and the military school, and founded the Communist Party of India.”<sup>1</sup> This contention has been shared by many bourgeois historians. Haithcox, for example, writes: “In late 1920 an emigre Communist Party of India was organised in Tashkent. The party was formed from among Indian *muhajirs*, who had participated in a *Hijarat*, or exodus, from India in protest against the dismemberment of Turkey.”<sup>2</sup>

The actual state of things, however, totally disproves this and similar contentions. The first Indian communist group, which declared itself to be the Communist Party of India on October 17, 1920, at the beginning did not comprise even a single *muhajir*. Only two of the seven members of that group had earlier been Muslim—Mohammad Ali and Mohammed Shafiq Siddiqi, but even they had arrived in Tashkent as representatives of the so-called Provisional Government of India based in Kabul, and had not participated in the exodus campaign as a Muslim movement. M. N. Roy, the leader of the group, was a Hindu, and one coming from a Brahman’s family at that. Other Hindus were Abani Mukherjee and M.P.T. Acharya. The group included two women—Rosa Fitingov (Mukherjee’s wife), a Soviet citizen, and Evelyn Trent-Roy (the wife of M. N. Roy), an American; neither had anything to do with Islam. Had the proclamation of the Communist Party been initiated by *muhajirs* then at least one of them would have been among the founding members of that communist group. Had the *muhajirs*, as Roy writes in his memoirs, insisted on organising the Communist Party as soon as possible, the first communist group would probably have been far bigger than one of seven, because there were over a hundred Indian emigres in Tashkent alone at the time. Besides, Roy’s communist group had admitted as few as three new members by December 15, that is during two months of intense agitation work to draw emigres into

<sup>1</sup> Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

the Communist Party. It is clear that there could have been less propaganda effort with not so modest results to show for it, had the *muhajirs*’ feeling been what Bandyopadhyaya makes it out to be.

M. N. Roy, a Hindu, was the actual organiser of the communist group and the man who initiated the proclamation of the Communist Party of India in Tashkent, although in his memoirs he holds the *muhajirs* responsible for that rash decision. Bandyopadhyaya was perfectly satisfied with that version and he, referring to a British agent’s dispatch discovered in archives, hastened to declare a Muslim, Abdur Rabb, and M. P. T. Acharya, the leaders of the so-called Indian Revolutionary Association, to have been the founders of the Communist Party of India. “These two individuals,” he writes, “rather than M. N. Roy, were the real founders of the Communist Party of India at Tashkent.”<sup>1</sup>

David N. Druhe, for whom it was important to prove by all means how “unsuitable” were the elements that presided over the birth of the Indian communist movement, is even more categorical. And he writes: “They [i. e., Acharya and Abdur Rabb—*Auth.*] and a minority of *muhajirs* who had been converted to Communism in the Tashkent propaganda school advocated the immediate formation of the Communist Party of India. Hence Acharya and his follower ... Abdur Rabb, rather than Roy, may be deemed the founders of the Communist Party of India.”<sup>2</sup>

These claims betray their authors’ rather poor competence. In actual fact, M. P. T. Acharya opposed the hasty and unprepared proclamation of the CPI, not to speak of Abdur Rabb who had never declared himself a Communist. It was the left sectarian-minded M. N. Roy and Abani Mukherjee, supporting him at the time, who rushed the formation of the Communist Party contrary to the opinion of Lenin who had urged patience and thorough preparation for such a serious matter. An official report to the Comintern on the work done in the three months of October 1920-January 1921 by the Provisional All-India Central Revolutionary Committee said, with reference to that

<sup>1</sup> Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

action: "The Communist elements present in Tashkent numbering seven in all, in pursuance of their principles and the plan previously formed in conjunction with European Communists,<sup>1</sup> constituted themselves into a duly organised Communist Party of India on October 17th, 1920."<sup>2</sup> As you see, there is no mention of the "persistent demands of the *muhajirs*" or of their intention to create a Communist party, nor could there be any.

In the above-mentioned report, just as in other important documents of the time, Roy constantly repeats his idea about the political inconsistency of the *muhajirs* even from the standpoint of the exigencies of the national revolution and, of course, their total inability to grasp the ideas of communism. They all considered themselves Muslims and defenders of Islam, first, and Indians and defenders of India, afterwards. Therefore, the report goes on, the Provisional All-India Central Revolutionary Committee found it hopeless to try to make internationalists out of those individuals. The fact that the Indian Revolutionary Committee was formed of Communists only made those exclusively Muslim elements unwilling to work with the men whom their religion had branded as "Kaffirs". Roy's assessments of the *muhajirs* cannot be accepted completely because they were derived from his left-sectarian orientation towards an immediate socialist revolution in India and the formation of a Communist party without any delay. The *muhajirs* were, naturally, not prepared, nor could they be, for either option. Yet it is in this narrowly limited sense that the passages we have quoted from the report conclusively disprove Bandyopadhyaya's concept of the so-called special allegiance of Muslims to socialism based on the "community of Bolshevism and Islam".

The emergence of the communist movement in Asian countries was the most obvious aftereffect of the Great October Revolution for the peoples of the East. It must be for this reason that bourgeois historians have been

<sup>1</sup> This must be an allusion to a plan concerted with representatives of the British Communists during the Second Congress of the Comintern, when an Indian Delegation (Roy, Mukherjee, Shafiq and E. Trent-Roy) met them.

<sup>2</sup> October Revolution Central State Archive (ORCSA), s. 5402, r. 1, f. 488, p. 2.

rather unanimous in the view that it was due to the notorious "hand of Moscow", rather than to the power of the influence of the October Revolution. Writers on India claim, in particular, that the Indian communist movement "was nurtured abroad and transplanted into the Indian soil" and that it was a result of the "activities of all these agents of Moscow", for in India proper there was no ground for the emergence of militant revolutionary organisations of the working class.<sup>1</sup>

Druhe claims that the communist movement in India emerged owing to the activities of "Red agents". Now, the agents themselves had turned red by pure accident. He writes that they were "'creatures of circumstance' whose conversion to Communism had been a purely fortuitous event".<sup>2</sup>

Haithcox also tries to explain the origin of the Indian communist movement by saying that it was the work of the Comintern's agents and that money came from Moscow. He goes even further in trying to assure his readers that the only reason why the Communists had called for the national independence of India was to make it easier for themselves to brainwash, recruit and convert national revolutionaries.<sup>3</sup> Elaborating on the same idea, Indian historian Zafar Imam actually holds that it was not the Indians themselves, but the Soviet leaders who decided on creating a Communist party in India. When they considered necessary to have a firm footing right inside India, they began working towards the establishment of communist groups in the country.<sup>4</sup>

American historians Overstreet and Windmiller, although their research is of a serious nature, challenge the idea of the national source of the Indian communist movement. They presume that this movement owes its origin to money and political support from the Comintern and Moscow which pursued their own particular objectives. "And it is

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party. A Historical Profile*, Adam and Charles Black, London, 1958, pp. 41-42; *Indian Communist Party Documents 1930-1956*, The Democratic Research Service, Bombay; The Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, 1957, pp. VI-VIII.

<sup>2</sup> David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> See: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> See: Zafar Imam, *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

probable," they write, "that, like many other Indians at that time, he [M. N. Roy—*Auth.*] was drawn to the Communist International not because of ideological convictions but rather because it provided political and financial support for his struggle against imperialism in India."<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the first organised Indian group of Communists sprang up in the Land of Soviets seems to confirm the opinion of bourgeois historians who call in question the authentically national origin of the Communist Party of India. But that is not so. Hard facts indicate that imperialists themselves, by their colonialist policies, contributed towards the accelerated germination of the seeds of communism in the soil of the Eastern countries. By their persecution and reprisals, the colonialists hastened the passage of national revolutionaries over to the Bolsheviks. The Iranian newspaper *Setare-ye-Iran* wrote about it back in December 1921. That comment had been prompted by a British note to the Government of the Russian Federation charging the Soviet envoy in Iran, F. A. Rothstein, with having spent much money on organising the propaganda of Bolshevism in that country. "British leaders," the paper wrote, "as enlightened people have no reason to complain to the Russian Government since they must know what exactly, whose policies in the East have called forth Russian propaganda. Had Turkey been happy, would it have been possible for socialist propaganda and agitation to be conducted there? Had everything been well in India, could the Russian consuls have had any influence on Indian society? It is not the Russian consuls but Britain's aggressive policy that has created resentment in the East against the British Government.... We are sure that had it not been for all that, neither Turkey, nor Afghanistan, to which socialist conditions are totally unacceptable, would have had to face the issue even a hundred years hence. If they have drawn close to Bolshevism that was because of the imperialist policy of the British in the East."<sup>2</sup>

The facts indicate also that the organisers of the first Indian communist group M. N. Roy, Abani Mukherjee, M. P. T. Acharya—former national revolutionaries—had come

<sup>1</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Bulletin of the ECCI*, No. 1, January 1, 1922; ORGSA, s. 5402, r. 1, f. 522, pp. 151-52.

to Soviet Russia already considering themselves Communists and it was they who had taken the initiative in proclaiming the formation of the Communist Party of India, not the Bolsheviks, nor Lenin who, on the contrary, had urged restraint and patience with regard to that matter. Roy himself wrote in September 1925 about this restraining position of Lenin's although he had acted against it in 1920 and understood and appreciated it at a much later date. In his "Communication on Party Work in India" he related: "We advisedly had not got down to creating the Communist Party right until the end of 1923, for it was too early to do that.... The ground had not yet been laid, there was a shortage of leading intellectuals, the proletariat remained too backward, and there was no point in creating an illusion of a Communist party of a handful of members who understood nothing at all about Communism. We guided ourselves by Lenin's warning about the danger of various liberation currents in the Eastern countries<sup>1</sup> painting themselves in the colours of communism."<sup>2</sup>

Scores of Indian national revolutionaries, representing the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals, arrived in Soviet Russia. They were by no means drawn in there by force to make Communists out of them. They came at their own free will.

So, where was the ground in which the irresistible impulse of Indian revolutionaries to come to the Land of Soviets and to strive for communism had arisen? That was nothing but the national soil of India—her anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle for independence. It is significant that a considerable proportion of the early Communists of India had come from the ranks of national revolutionaries.

The best representatives of the national revolutionary petty-bourgeois democracy of India, after long years of fruitless work in clandestine terrorist and other conspira-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: M. A. Persits, *Op. cit.*, p. 156. It is indicative that in this document Roy passes over the fact of the Communist Party of India having been proclaimed in Tashkent, as if there had been none at all. Evidently, it was quite obvious even at that stage that what had been formed was not a party but no more than a party group abroad which was to work towards creating the real party in India proper.

<sup>2</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 149-50.

torial organisations, began to understand the limitations of nationalism and its inadequacy for a radical solution of the problem of national liberation. The October Revolution showed the great force of Marxist-Leninist theory for them to see. It was only too natural for them to feel attracted by it and to make it a point of travelling all the way to Soviet Russia because they had achieved nothing during their long-drawn exile in Western Europe and in the United States. In Soviet Russia they could count on real support: they saw that they were united with Soviet government by the community of anti-imperialist interests and that only in Soviet Russia could they best of all study the experience of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, which they obviously needed more than anything else.

However, the process of learning Marxist theory was long and complicated, for the Indian national revolutionaries in particular, because of the petty-bourgeois notions they still had. It was precisely the immature knowledge of Marxism that led to the abortive attempts of the early Indian Communists to create a Communist Party abroad immediately, as far back as 1920 or 1921. India still lacked the necessary socio-economic and political conditions for it. Nor could such conditions have been artificially created among revolutionaries in exile in a foreign land.

A little later, in 1921-1922, Indian communist groups began to be created in India, in spite of the most ruthless persecution by the British authorities. Far apart from one another, the former national revolutionaries, for the most part, ventured upon the task of building an all-India Communist Party in four cities—Calcutta, Bombay, Lahore and Madras.<sup>1</sup> It was only in December 1925 that the Communist Party of India was proclaimed in Kanpur, following the merger of intra-Indian and emigrant communist elements. But even after that it took years to bring off the difficult process of its formation. That happened at a later stage, when the necessary conditions had arisen and Marxist socialism began to fuse with the Indian working-class movement. So, what is it that can be seen as artificial in that long-drawn process of formation of the Com-

<sup>1</sup> See: Muzaffar Ahmad, *Myself and the Communist Party of India 1920-1929*, National Book Agency (Private), Ltd., Calcutta, 1970, p. 78.

munist Party of India out of individual communist groups, one of which sprang up in Soviet Russia? Where is the "hand of Moscow" to be seen there? There was nothing but the objective impact of the October Revolution on the colonial world, supplemented by the natural desire of the Russian Communists to share their revolutionary experience with all those who wanted it.

Striving to play down the tremendous revolutionising importance of the October Revolution for India, Bandyopadhyaya turns to considering the reactions of the Indian national press towards the Russian socialist revolution. In spite of a biased selection of quotations, that author still had to admit that "the initial impact of the Russian Revolution on the nationalist press in India was on the whole favourable". But it is, evidently, not this conclusion that the author strove for by his laborious study of Indian newspapers fifty years old. And, indeed, he adds the following notable remark: "There is no evidence to indicate that the press approved of the Communist ideology, the methods or the ultimate objectives of the Revolution."<sup>1</sup> But why, indeed, properly speaking, had the press, reflecting the interests of the Indian national bourgeoisie, to approve of the communist ideology and the course followed by the Bolsheviks in abolishing the exploiter classes? As we have already pointed out, the October Revolution had influenced the Indian bourgeoisie (and not only that bourgeoisie) primarily by carrying out its nationalities programme and granting the right of self-determination to the peoples of the former Russian Empire. Now, on that issue the nationalist Indian press was lavish in most approving comments. More, it carried them in spite of the censorship and the strictest bans of the British authorities. Besides, many nationalist newspapers appreciated the social and anti-capitalist essence of the October Revolution as well. Articles and comments of this kind were produced by progressive nationalist leaders who began, precisely under the influence of the Great October Revolution, to understand the need for social change in favour of peasants and workers because there could have been no success in the national liberation struggle without their participation.

<sup>1</sup> Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

The British intelligence chief in Delhi Cecil Kaye was not too long in detecting the brewing revolutionary-democratic tendency, brought about by the October Revolution, in the liberation movement in India and, deliberately overplaying the danger, explained it in his own way by claiming that "the nationalist movement was closely associated with the idea of deliverance of the labouring classes, in attitude from which it was only a short step to pure Communism".<sup>1</sup> Although Bandyopadhyaya, the historian, unlike the British intelligence officer, did not discover such a tendency in the columns of the Indian nationalist press, one can, indeed, draw relevant conclusions from numerous books and articles written on the subject.<sup>2</sup>

Bandyopadhyaya writes that the sympathetic reaction of the Indian nationalist press to the October Revolution "was in fact prompted by the stagnation and backwardness of India under British rule, and the suppression of the Indian freedom movement".<sup>3</sup> In other words, the author seems to contend that the whole matter was due to the oppressed condition of the Indian people rather than to the October Revolution. Yet the very greatness of the October Revolution consisted in the fact that it had fetched a favourable response from the oppressed and suppressed masses around the world and gave them fresh inspiration to raise the level of their struggle for social and national liberation. That is to say Bandyopadhyaya's statement underlines the immense importance of the October Revolution for Indian society, rather than belittles it.

What Bandyopadhyaya, the historian, does not want to understand nowadays was well understood back in 1918 by his compatriots fighting for their country's liberation. A memorandum which was handed to Yakov Sverdlov, Chairman of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, in November, by two Indian envoys—Jabbar and Sattar Khairy—clearly defined the meaning and importance of the Great October Revolution for the national liberation struggle in India. "The Russian revolution," the document

<sup>1</sup> Cecil Kaye, *Communism in India (1919-1924)*, Calcutta, 1971, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Lenin. His Image in India*, Ed. by Devendra Kaushik and Leonid Mitrokhin, Vikas Publications, Delhi, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, pp. 127-28.

said, "has made a great impression on the mentality of the Indian people. For all the opposition from Britain, the slogan of self-determination of nations reached India." Consequently, it was not the elements of egalitarianism in the Koran, but the "proclamation [by Soviet government—*Auth.*] of new ideals that worked a change in our mentality", the Memorandum stressed, and "made Indians involved in the political struggle and world development".<sup>1</sup>

Speaking of the influence of the October Revolution on Indian nationalist leaders, the author touches on an interesting and intricate subject but, of course, not rewarding one at all, considering the author's intention, for, while studying it, he inevitably arrives at what are uncomfortable conclusions for him. It is not by chance that the author should have chosen a primitive and unconvincing solution to the problem he had before him. Of the great number of outstanding leaders of the Indian national liberation movement who had reacted enthusiastically and favourably to the October Revolution, he turned to three best-known—Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Rajendra Prasad. He perused the writings of each of them for some negative comments on the October Revolution and Soviet government and, finding none, he looked for other pronouncements of theirs, having nothing to do with the subject, to fit in with his own argument. Speaking of Rajendra Prasad, the President of India in 1950-1962, Bandyopadhyaya claims that although he "was familiar with the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, but could not recall the extent of his knowledge at this time about Communism or the Russian Revolution".<sup>2</sup> Speaking about Gandhi, the author quotes him as having said: "India does not want Bolshevism."<sup>3</sup> And he adds that Gandhi "had no ideological sympathies whatsoever for the Communist view-point". Then he accuses Nehru of a "rather one-sided view of the Russian Revolution".<sup>4</sup> It was one-sided, in his judgement, for instance, because of the following state-

<sup>1</sup> *Izvestia*, November 26, 1918; see also: *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol. I, Ed. by G. Adhikari, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1971, pp. 96-100.

<sup>2</sup> Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

ment: as a result of the October Revolution "for the first time in history the representatives of the poorest classes, and especially of the industrial workers, were at the head of a country".<sup>1</sup> But whereas Bandyopadhyaya did mention that quotation in his book, he left out many other, even more striking quotations, probably because he had found them much too "one-sided", as this one, for example: "I had no doubt that the Soviet revolution had advanced human society by a great leap and had lit a bright flame which could not be smothered, and that it had laid the foundations for that 'new civilisation' towards which the world would advance,"<sup>2</sup> Nehru wrote. During his visit to the Soviet Union in 1955, he said: "Even though we pursued a different path in our struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, we admired Lenin and were influenced by his example."<sup>3</sup>

Bandyopadhyaya still had to draw what was an undesirable conclusion for him. He wrote: even Mahatma Gandhi "seems to have thought at this time that the Soviet Union was, directly or indirectly, promoting the cause of freedom in the world", and, in particular, that "the Russian Revolution had helped the Indian people in their struggle for freedom". Moreover, Bandyopadhyaya could not but acknowledge that "even relatively conservative leaders in India took a somewhat favourable view of the Russian Revolution in the early years".<sup>4</sup>

So, how does Bandyopadhyaya reconcile these more or less objective conclusions with the anti-Soviet thrust of his book? He simply declares those views of nationalist leaders on the October Revolution to be no longer valid because, he argues, the Indian leaders did not know about the aggressive intentions of the Soviet Government, Lenin and the Comintern against India. That is just what he said: "These views indicate that the Indian leaders at this time were unaware of the ideological, strategic and tactical

considerations regarding India, which were engaging the serious attention of Lenin, the Bolshevik Government and the Comintern, and the nature of Soviet activities in Tashkent and other parts of Central Asia."<sup>1</sup>

#### REAL AND IMAGINARY AGGRESSION

Allegations about Soviet Russia's aggressive intentions regarding India were widely circulated by British propaganda right after the victory of the October Revolution, more particularly during the Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919 and after it. Indian nationalist leaders were not just told about Soviet Russia's projected invasion of India with the aid of Afghanistan, but the idea was being forced down their throats by British newspapers. Consequently, such men as Gandhi and Nehru knew that British version. How, then, did they react to it? Very negatively. Even Gandhi, who disapproved of violent methods of dealing with the enemies of the revolution in Russia, declared: "I have never believed in a Bolshevik menace." He said more. He exposed the repressive policies of British imperialism in India and underscored Soviet Russia's noble role in countering them: "Fraternisation of the Soviet Union with Asiatic countries and the anti-British policy of King Amanullah in Afghanistan served as a check on the naked repressive character of British imperialism."<sup>2</sup> Bandyopadhyaya quotes these utterances in order to convince the reader of his objectivity and make him believe, besides, that in the early 1920s Indian nationalist leaders denied Soviet Russia's aggressiveness towards India only because they were uninformed. However, Bandyopadhyaya has produced no evidence of Soviet Russia's aggressive intentions, nor could he have produced any, of course.

The governments of imperialist powers in those years accused the Soviet government of "insatiable aggressiveness" and of attempts to grab almost the whole world. Lenin ridiculed and exposed the class-inspired nature of those false accusations against the Land of Soviets. At the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from: Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, pp. 144, 143.

<sup>1</sup> Tayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, The John Day Company, New York, 1946, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches, March 1953-August 1957*, Vol. 3, The Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India, Delhi, 1958, p. 302.

<sup>4</sup> Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, pp. 143-44.

Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) he said that some people were claiming that "we want to conquer Germany. That is, of course, ridiculous, nonsensical. But the bourgeoisie have their own interests and their own press, which is shouting this to the whole world in hundreds of millions of copies; Wilson, too, is supporting this in his own interests. The Bolsheviks, they declare, have a large army, and they want, by means of conquest, to implant their Bolshevism in Germany."<sup>1</sup>

There are some Western politicians and scholars who quite often make such claims nowadays, too. The most zealous exponent of this sort of ideas is David N. Druhe whose book is full of outright hatred for the Soviet Union and communism. Besides, it clearly betrays the author's contemptuous attitude to Indian revolutionaries, their aspirations and temporary delusions. Apart from that, the work abounds in factual errors and information borrowed from unreliable sources. It is indicative that it is this book that Bandyopadhyaya, entirely sharing Druhe's position, usually refers to in a bid to prove his points.

Opening his narrative with a cursory essay about the history of Russian-Indian relations, Druhe, naturally, relates principally the intentions of Paul and Alexander I, together with Napoleon, to crush Britain with a blow at India as well as about the abortive attempts at organising war marches into the South Asian subcontinent undertaken by other Russian Czars in the 19th century. Nevertheless, the author concludes that, in spite of this, Czarist "Russia had no design of invading India either to liberate the Indians or to substitute Russian for British rule in the Peninsula". Druhe, passing on to a description of Soviet intentions with regard to India, holds that they, naturally, were "an entirely different matter". Druhe writes that, "as applied to India, the plan of the world revolution meant neither more nor less than the substitution of the British Raj by a disguised Russian Raj, ruled as a radical Indian organisation, the Communist Party of India".<sup>2</sup> It is not uninteresting to note that back in 1922 Leo Pasvolsky formulated about the same idea. He wrote: "This [Soviet-Auth.] Russia is bound to

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B), March 18-23, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

be, by its very nature, insatiably aggressive and, though in a different sense from its Imperial predecessor, violently imperialistic" since the Soviet government "dreams of a world social revolution" and of extending it to Asia and plans, notably, "an armed expedition into India, calculated to arouse ... revolutionary fires".<sup>1</sup>

Unlike Druhe and Pasvolsky, Chattar Singh Samra refrains from unequivocal statements about Soviet Russia's aggressive designs against India. He chooses a different line of reasoning, taking up the contention that the presence of Austrian, German and Turkish POWs in Soviet Russia's Central Asian regions created a stark danger of an invasion of India by Turkish and German armies via Afghanistan. Quoting a British Government yearbook, the author writes of some undisclosed "German machinations" which Soviet Russia is alleged to have encouraged, thereby creating a real threat to India.<sup>2</sup> This author seeks, in fact, to justify the British intervention inside Soviet Russia, holding it to have been a measure of self-defence against Bolshevik actions which are claimed not only to have contributed to the German-Turkish crusade, but also to have intended by their "efforts—warlike in the beginning but passive afterwards—to spread Communism in India".<sup>3</sup> To bear out the allegations about the Soviet Government's connivance at German and Turkish intentions, the author refers to the recollections of British interventionists in Turkestan: the British consul in Kashgar P. T. Etherton, Lieutenant-Colonel F. M. Bailey, the chief of the so-called military-diplomatic mission of Great Britain in Tashkent, and Major-General Wilfried Malleson who commanded the British troops which invaded the Transcaspian region in August 1918.<sup>4</sup> However, the biased evidence of these authors can hardly serve as convincing proof of the argument which was put forward. With their help, Samra, naturally, failed to produce any real facts, neither did he produce any credible "evidence". All the author does is simply to communicate to us the opinion of the said leaders that "a Turko-German army might

<sup>1</sup> Leo Pasvolsky, *Op. cit.*, pp. 71, 101.

<sup>2</sup> See: Chattar Singh Samra, *Op. cit.*, pp. 23-25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 158.

<sup>4</sup> See: P. T. Etherton, *Op. cit.*; F. M. Bailey, *Mission to Tashkent*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1946.

materialise for a campaign against India through Afghanistan".<sup>1</sup> One can, of course, understand the anxiety of the British Government, one of the principal organisers of the anti-Soviet intervention, in connection with a massive participation of former POWs in battles for Soviet government against the Whiteguards and interventionists, but that is outside the scope of evidence already.

Samra opens his book by saying that he intends to "throw some light on the Indian aspect of the polemical question as to whether or not the policies of Soviet Russia constitute, in substance, a continuation and execution of the imperialist aspirations of Tsarist predecessors under new forms and new techniques". True to his own principle of having the facts speak for themselves, the author does not give a straight answer to the question at issue. But Samra extensively quotes anti-Soviet fabrications of *The Times*, even such of them which he himself finds to be fakes, and draws on clearly slanted memoirs of invaders, British generals and intelligence officers, declaring all that to be facts.

Druhe's arguments are no more convincing. They are based on outright fabrications and uncritical references to the obviously unobjective sources and unjustified conclusions drawn from them. The author considers his own contention that Roy's plan for military operations along the border and in India "was approved in the early autumn of 1920 by the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party and the Council of People's Commissars" as well as by Lenin, who is alleged to have considered Roy's scheme to be "in the interest of the world revolution",<sup>2</sup> to be the most important evidence of the aggressive intentions of Soviet Russia.

The plan for military operations along the border and in India is a very characteristic document for the left-revolutionary outlook of Roy and his group. It has graphically reflected many indications of leftism which afflicted the early Communists not only of India but of many other countries of the East and some Soviet government officials in those days. Lenin was the first to detect the Eastern

<sup>1</sup> Chattar Singh Samra, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> See: David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

Communists' disease of "leftism" and went all out to combat it long before the Second Congress of the Comintern as well as at the Congress itself and after it.

During a preliminary discussion of Lenin's original draft theses on the national and colonial questions before the Second Congress of the Comintern, a group of party members from Soviet Turkestan—among them T. Ryskulov and N. Khodjayev—unequivocally broached the question of a liberating march of the Red Army into India through Afghanistan. In their letter of June 12, 1920 to Lenin, they objected to the most important point of the theses that the main responsibility for providing most active assistance for the bourgeois-democratic movement in the colonies "rests primarily with the workers of the country the backward nation is colonially or financially dependent on".<sup>1</sup> In their opinion, that could do no more than hold up the liberation of India and other countries of Asia since it was determined, or so it seemed to them, by the necessity of the initial victory of the socialist revolution in the metropolitan country. They manifestly underrated the moral, political, organisational and propaganda aid which the conscious proletariat of a capitalist country could lend to the peoples of the East. The authors of the letter considered that Lenin's thesis was meant to confine the Russian workers' liberating mission to Turkestan alone for it banned them from "crossing into India through Afghanistan". The letter said: "India must be freed by the Muslim proletariat" of Soviet Russia and "certainly before the Revolution in London".<sup>2</sup>

The same idea of imposing happiness not only on India alone but on all the colonial and dependent countries adjacent to Russia was expressed by Y. A. Preobrazhensky, a Trotskyite. Opposing the same thesis of Lenin's, he said: "If it proves impossible to reach economic agreement with the leading national groups, the latter will inevitably be suppressed by force and economically important regions will be compelled to join a union of European Republics."<sup>3</sup> Lenin flatly objected to attempts at "bringing about" a

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Narody Azii i Afriki*, No. 5, 1974, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 555.

socialist revolution in the East by force of arms. He commented on Preobrazhensky's remarks in the strongest possible and purely negative terms: "It goes too far. It cannot be proved, and it is wrong to say that *suppression* by force is 'inevitable'. That is radically wrong."<sup>1</sup> Back at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Lenin stressed: "Communism cannot be imposed by force."<sup>2</sup> In those distant times, leftist-minded Communists of Asia more than once proposed organising a Red Army's liberating march so as to bring about a revolution not only in India but in China, Turkey and Iran as well. However, Lenin emphatically rejected every single one of those proposals.<sup>3</sup> They were also rejected by Lenin during his numerous discussions with Roy before the Second Congress of the Comintern.

Lenin's formula about indispensable aid by the Communists to the national liberation struggle of the peoples of the East remained unchanged and was endorsed by decision of the Second Congress of the Comintern. In line with that course, the Plenum of the Central Committee of the RCP(B), with Lenin participating, passed a special resolution soon afterwards on providing "arms and gold" as aid to the Indian revolutionaries,<sup>4</sup> because they represented at the time the most active and militant trend of the Indian people's anti-imperialist struggle.

At the same time, neither the Political Bureau of the RCP(B) Central Committee, nor the Council of People's Commissars, nor V. I. Lenin could ever approve of a left-sectarian plan of military operations along the border and in India. So, what was it that Druhe based his claim on? His only source was Roy's memoirs. But, first, in his memoirs, too, Roy pointed out Lenin's disagreement with a plan for a military version of the Indian revolution.<sup>5</sup> And, second, that source can in no way be considered reli-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 555.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B), March 18-23, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> For details see: M. A. Persits, "Ideological Struggle over the Problems of Relationship Between the Communists and Liberation Movement During the Second Congress of the Comintern", *Narody Azii i Afriki*, No. 5, 1974, pp. 45-47.

<sup>4</sup> See: Rostislav Ulyanovsky, *Op. cit.*, pp. 78-80.

<sup>5</sup> See: M. N. Roy's *Memoirs*, p. 417.

able. Wittingly or unwittingly, it contained a lot of untruths and its material requires thorough verification.<sup>1</sup>

Such a verification is necessary in the given case as well. Let us turn to a document, also written by Roy, but at the very time when those events were taking place, not 35 years after. The official report to the Comintern about the work done by the Provisional All-India Central Revolutionary Committee for three months, from October 1920 to January 1921, does not mention at all the subject of interest to us, which would have been simply impossible had the Council of People's Commissars sanctioned Roy's military plan. For, indeed, the report gives a very detailed account not only of all the practical action by Indian revolutionaries but of the background to that action.

By having ascribed to the Bolsheviks Roy's leftist declarations about the paramount role of the military factor in preparing and carrying out the socialist revolution in India, Druhe has done his best to bear out his own argument. To this end, he reviews the Soviet policy of aid to the national liberation movements of the peoples of Iran, Xinjiang and particularly Afghanistan as acts of implementation of a supposedly devised plan of invading India.

One of the essential arguments in Druhe's system of "evidence" was an account of the arrival of two trains, each of 27 cars, in Tashkent on October 1, 1920, loaded with arms, ammunition, uniform, dismantled aircraft, gold ingots, pounds sterling and rifles. There was a group of military instructors travelling in one of the cars. Roy in person was in a special car as an alleged head of an expedition bound for Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

That account has been given not only by Druhe, interpreting it as evidence of a projected Soviet invasion of India. It has been quoted also by such writers as Overstreet and Windmiller<sup>3</sup> who, it is true, leave the reader to wonder what such "weighty" evidence as two trainloads of arms can testify to. All they do is to remind the readers that for the Bolsheviks "apart from offering a weapon against

<sup>1</sup> For details see: M. A. Persits, *India's Revolutionaries in Soviet Russia. The Mainsprings of the Indian Communist Movement*, pp. 147-56.

<sup>2</sup> See: David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> See: Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

Britain, India in itself presented an attractive object for the export of revolution".<sup>1</sup> They write, besides, that shortly after his arrival in Tashkent, Roy had already "formed what he described as the first international brigade of the Red Army"<sup>2</sup> to invade India. In reality, however, the arms and ammunition which had arrived in Tashkent accompanied by a small group of military instructors were meant principally for Afghanistan which the government of Amanullah Khan had asked the Soviet Government for and was promised.

A year before that, on November 27, 1919, Lenin, in reply to Amanullah Khan's letter brought to Moscow by an Afghan mission under Mohammad Wali Khan, sent a message of friendship to Kabul. He communicated that the Soviet representatives in Kabul had been instructed to enter into negotiations in order to conclude trade and other friendly treaties whose object "is not only the consolidation of good-neighbourly relations for the greatest benefit of both nations, but a common struggle with Afghanistan against the world's most rapacious imperialist government, that of Great Britain, whose intrigues, as you rightfully point out in your letter, have so far impeded the peaceful and free development of the Afghan people and estranged it from its nearest neighbours". Lenin also wrote that from his conversations with Mohammad Wali Khan he learned about Afghanistan's desire to obtain military aid from the Russian people for action against British imperialism and that the Soviet Government was "inclined to provide this aid to the Afghan people in the largest possible amounts".<sup>3</sup> Incidentally, the mission of military instructors that was going to Kabul at the Emir's request was not led by Roy at all, nor was it under his control. Roy just happened to travel in its train to Tashkent and was going to proceed further on, into Afghanistan, where he proposed to organise an Indian revolutionary centre. However, Kabul's political waverings compelled the Indians to give up their intention.

<sup>1</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from: A. N. Kheifets, *Soviet Russia and Adjacent Countries of the East During the Civil War (1918-1920)*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1964, pp. 286-87 (in Russian).

Invariably following its original foreign policy line of lending all-round support to the national liberation struggle of oppressed peoples, the Soviet Government was not only the first among the governments of the world to recognise Afghanistan's independence won at the cost of a hard-fought war against Britain, but provided as much material support for it as it could.

That was a point of common interest to Afghanistan and Soviet Russia since both nations were upholding their right to exist in the struggle against British imperialism. Britain was waging an undeclared predatory war against Soviet Russia, backing up, besides, her internal enemies—the Whiteguards and the *basmach* bands. Now, should Afghanistan and Soviet Russia have been able to rise together against the British armed forces, that would have been a perfectly justified act having nothing to do with a conquest of India or a crusade against her.

Under Britain's pressure, Kabul refused to admit the Soviet mission and it stayed in Tashkent, with some of its instructors invited to teach at the Indian military courses. The orders of the day issued for the courses frequently had this formula: "So-and-so, having arrived from the staff of the Russian mission in Afghanistan, shall be appointed to such-and-such post."<sup>1</sup> The military equipment which had been brought in was likewise used by the courses for training purposes. So, it is in the very organisation of military training courses and in providing them with a teaching staff, finances and military and technical facilities that the aid to the Indian revolutionaries with "arms and gold", under the resolution of the RCP(B) Central Committee Plenum, found its expression.

The "evidence" which Druhe and other writers have produced in an attempt to prove that Soviet Russia intended to capture India can hardly be taken as carrying any conviction.

The signing in February 1921 of the Soviet-Afghan treaty establishing friendly relations was, in Druhe's opinion, meant to prepare the conditions for a march by Roy's army on India, while the institution of Soviet consular offices in a number of Afghan cities meant creating "propaganda

<sup>1</sup> CSASA, s. 25025, r. 2, f. 2, pp. 2, 3, 4, etc.

centres aimed against British India".<sup>1</sup> But, first, there was no "Roy's army" or "Roy's brigade" in existence either in 1920 or, still less so, in 1921. The hundred or two hundred Indians divided, besides, into contending groups and scattered in various Soviet cities could not have formed a military brigade in purely physical terms. Second, where, when and in what documents did Druhe discover so much as a hint at any Soviet propaganda against India proper? There was, of course, a lot of propaganda against British imperialism which oppressed India. But India and Britain were not the same thing at all.

Druhe declared all the work by Indian revolutionaries in Tashkent and other cities of Turkestan to have been in preparation for a Soviet invasion of India. All Indian emigres were declared to be a weapon of the Soviet government which was alleged to be bent on having enough Indians trained as "zealous Communists and good soldiers, so that the invasion would look like a true 'liberation' of India, and not a conquest by Russia".<sup>2</sup> That was the thinking behind his evaluation even of the arrival of the *muhajirs* in Tashkent and the training of fifteen of them at a propaganda school as well as the proclamation of the so-called Communist party and, more particularly, of course, the institution of officer training courses with 20 to 40 trainees under instruction for three or four months, and the service in the Red Army of a small number of Indians having escaped from the British forces occupying North Iran.

In reality, all the facts just listed were no more than a manifestation of the upsurge of the national liberation movement in India, notably, the rise of the number of revolutionary-minded Indians who were looking for more effective ways of decisive action against British rule in India.

The aid, in terms of propaganda, military instruction and material assistance, which the Soviet people lent to the Indian revolutionaries, was entirely in agreement with Soviet government's determination to enter into an alliance with the oppressed peoples of the East in the name of a

joint struggle against a common enemy—international imperialism. And that aid, contrary to the claims made by Druhe, Bandyopadhyaya, Samra and some other writers, did not mean at all any preparations for a march of conquest on India.

Both Druhe and Samra consider that the struggle of the Bolsheviks to liberate Central Asia from the *basmach* bands and invaders was a major element of preparations for the conquest of India. These writers cite, for example, the order of the day by the then Commander of the Turkestan Front, M. Sokolnikov, which he signed on October 10, 1920, upon the dispatch of a military unit into the Pamirs, and interpret the words of that document as confirming the argument about Soviet Russia's aggressive designs against India. Here is an extract from the order of the day, as quoted by Samra: "Comrades of the Pamir Division, you have been given a responsible task. The Soviet Republic sends you to garrison the posts on the Pamir on the frontiers of the friendly countries of Afghanistan and India. The Pamir tableland divides revolutionary Russia from India.... On this tableland you, the signallers of the revolution, must hoist the Red flag of the army of liberation. May the peoples of India, who fight against their English oppressors, soon know that friendly help is not far off."<sup>1</sup> There was a slight difference between that document and the text which had been published by Soviet newspapers. One thing must be pointed out: Samra speaks of a "division" while the order of the day referred to a "Red Army detachment".<sup>2</sup>

The movement of a Soviet army unit to the Soviet Pamirs was a natural and logical thing because the national frontiers had to be guarded, and there were some at the time to guard them against. It was just as natural that the Red Army's approach to India's northern frontiers lying close to the places inhabited by bellicose tribes that had rebelled against British rule more than once, was a factor which revolutionised Indians and, of course, disturbed Britain very much. However, that was an objective factor produced by the very nature of Soviet government. It is this

<sup>1</sup> See: Chattar Singh Samra, *Op. cit.*, pp. 52-53. See also: David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Kommunist*, Baku, December 8, 1920.

<sup>1</sup> David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

that Sokolnikov referred to. As to his statement of Soviet Russia's readiness to help the Indian people, that depended entirely on the desire of the Indians themselves and did not show an intention to organise an expansionist march on the subcontinent.

An essential element of Druhe's construct about preparations for the Red Army's march on India was his contention that Lenin himself had proclaimed the slogan: "The road to London and Paris lay through Peking and Calcutta."<sup>1</sup> Yet the author does not point out any chapter and verse where one could read that phrase of Lenin's, nor could he have named it because that was a statement by Trotsky, not by Lenin. In August 1919 Trotsky approached the RCP(B) Central Committee with a proposal to organise an armed crusade into India, so as to bring nearer the revolution in Europe. Motivating his project, he wrote: "The road to Paris and London lies via the towns of Afghanistan, the Punjab and Bengal."<sup>2</sup> The CC RCP(B), naturally, rejected that reckless appeal.

As to the political schooling of Indian emigres in Soviet Russia and their subsequent repatriation to India, that was something nobody has ever thought of denying. However, work of that kind attested not to the Red Army's preparations for the conquest of India, but to the desire of the early Indian Communists to tell their own people about Soviet Russia, thereby working towards their revolutionising, accelerating the development of the communist movement and radicalising the national liberation struggle at home for, in fact, it is for that reason that they had come to the Land of Soviets.

Soviet government met the aspirations of Indian emigres. By doing so, it was not only helping the peoples find the right way to national liberation as soon as possible, but was defending Soviet soil against the invading armed forces of imperialism which were using neighbouring Asian countries as bridgeheads to strike at Soviet Russia from.

A number of Indian historians reject the allegations like those of Druhe. For example, Zafar Imam emphatically objects to Druhe's concepts. He reports that, contrary

<sup>1</sup> David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> See: *The Trotsky Papers 1917-1919*, Vol. I, Mouton and Co., London, The Hague, Paris, 1964, p. 625.

to official declarations by the British authorities about an alleged impending threat of a Russo-Afghan attack on India, prominent Congress members characterised the talk about that threat as a "clear lie concocted by our enemies to divert the attention of the nation from the goal on which it has fixed its gaze". Zafar Imam writes in no uncertain terms: "In fact, in 1920, no responsible Soviet leader, except, perhaps, Trotsky, seriously toyed with the idea of liberating India from British rule by armed action."<sup>1</sup>

#### ORIENTAL POLICIES OF BOLSHEVIKS AND THE COMINTERN

It is with particular energy and in concord with each other that bourgeois and revisionist historians attack the line taken by Soviet Communists and the Comintern in providing the utmost support for the national liberation movement of the peoples of the oppressed East.

That unanimity is quite easy to explain for it is that line of action that has been and still is the most popular one in the East. It appealed to the widest sections of the population, contributed towards advancing their anti-imperialist struggle and earned the obvious approval of the national bourgeoisie which led the struggle against foreign rule. What is particularly important is that this line led to the emergence of a combat alliance of the international proletariat, above all, that of Soviet Russia, with the national liberation movement of the East. Naturally, international imperialism sought to discredit at any cost Soviet Russia's and the Comintern's policy of cooperation and alliance with the national revolutionary forces of colonial and dependent countries. Therefore, bourgeois and revisionist writers proclaim that policy to be wholly selfish, for it, they claim, does not proceed from the interests of the oppressed peoples but from the national interests of Soviet Russia alone. For example, Demetrio Boersner, who has written a big book about the policy of the Bolsheviks on the national and colonial questions, refers to "constant attempts on the part of Communism to 'use' the national

<sup>1</sup> Zafar Imam, *Op. cit.*, pp. 143, 147.

emancipation struggles for its own purpose".<sup>1</sup> To keep the word "use", which he puts in quotation marks, from misleading the readers, the author elaborates: "The interests of Russia came to dictate the Communists' tactics in the colonial countries more than the local conditions in these countries themselves."<sup>2</sup> Druhe goes on to enlarge upon that argument, too: "The Russian line and that of the Communists in India often changed between November 1917 and August 1947 as regards India, but those changes only reflected Russia's interests and not those of India."<sup>3</sup> Samra echoes him by suggesting that Soviet Russia supported the exodus movement from India in order to bring pressure to bear on Britain so as to establish diplomatic relations with her.<sup>4</sup> Zafar Imam sums it up by saying that Soviet Russia, as he presumes, was interested in getting allies to join her to defeat imperialism rather than in the problem of liberating the oppressed peoples of the East.<sup>5</sup>

The contention that the policy of supporting the national liberation movement in the East had nothing to do with any concern for the lot of the oppressed peoples and was prompted by nothing but the national interests of Soviet Russia has no real foundation in fact and cannot be overlooked.

It is perfectly obvious that an alliance of large social groups, classes, or even entire nations cannot be durable and effective unless it reflects the true and deep-rooted interest of each of the parties concluding it. For, otherwise, such an alliance would be no more than fiction, fraud or trap for one or several allies and would collapse like a house of cards at a crucial moment. In this particular case, because of the objective nature of the proletariat and the proletarian state, its class interests are at the same time the fullest possible expression of the aspirations of all the oppressed peoples, comprising the interests of the colonial and dependent peoples of the East. International imperialism is their common enemy, against whom both equally

<sup>1</sup> Demetrio Boersner, *The Bolsheviks and the National and Colonial Question (1917-1928)*, Librairie E. Droz, Geneva; Librairie Minard, Paris, 1957, p. XII.

<sup>2</sup> Demetrio Boersner, *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> See: Chattar Singh Samra, *Op. cit.*, pp. 50-51, 54.

<sup>5</sup> See: Zafar Imam, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

want to unite, and it is for that reason that an alliance between them is indispensable and logical.

Lenin pointed out very accurately that the world policy of violence pursued by imperialism "is leading to closer relations, alliance and friendship among all the oppressed nations".<sup>1</sup> Long before the October Revolution, Lenin produced a set of arguments to justify the logical necessity for the national liberation struggle of the Eastern peoples to converge and merge with the revolutionary movement of the international proletariat because their basic interests coincided.

There was an upsurge of the national liberation struggle in the East since the Russian revolution of 1905 and under its direct impact. That was the starting point of an objective process of developing cooperation and an alliance between the Russian revolutionary proletariat and the peoples of the East having started to fight for their national liberation. By 1905 the Bolsheviks had a clear Marxist programme on the national and colonial questions, elaborated by Lenin. The programme called for action to win the right for the oppressed nations to secede and form independent states and called on the Russian proletariat to lend vigorous support to the national liberation movement. That alone was a solid foundation for the subsequent alliance of the two revolutionary forces. But the Bolsheviks could not limit themselves to enunciating the programme. They went ahead to carry it out.

The aid which the Bolsheviks offered to the national revolutions of Asian countries was of particular importance. Their most essential support (in terms of manpower, arms and money) was given to the revolutionaries of Iran during their revolution of 1905-1911, that is, *before the victory* of the Great October Socialist Revolution. But the most important thing the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) did for the Asian revolutions and for the proclamation and manifestation of solidarity with them was the manifold and uncompromising struggle of the Bolsheviks against the expansionist and reactionary policies of Czarist Russia and international imperialism in the Eastern

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, December 22-29, 1920", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 491.

countries. The articles and leaflets, written by Lenin and other Bolsheviks, exposed the plans and aggressive action of Czarism and European powers in China and Korea, in Persia and Turkey.<sup>1</sup> The Bolsheviks called on the world-wide working-class movement to address itself to a militant objective of foiling the conspiracy of the imperialists of Russia, Britain and Germany against the Asian revolutions.

In their turn, by their national liberation struggle, the Eastern peoples dealt telling blows at international and Russian imperialism, thereby making it easier for the international proletariat to attain *its own* class aims.

That was virtually how the combat alliance of the Russian proletariat with the advanced forces of the national liberation movement of the peoples of the East was taking shape. And that alliance was effective and solid, for it was one of interest to all of the parties to it. "The Russian revolution has a great international ally both in Europe and in Asia," Lenin wrote in 1908.<sup>2</sup> Lenin made no secret of the proletariat's "selfish" interest in strengthening the alliance with the national liberation struggle of the Persians, Indians and Egyptians. "We," he said, "believe it is our duty and *in our interest*" to converge and to merge with them "for otherwise socialism in Europe will *not be secure*."<sup>3</sup> Lenin even laid stress on the words "in our interest" for he saw the interest of the proletariat, as equally the interest of the other side, as a pledge of the dependability and effectiveness of the combat alliance of the revolutionary forces. Early in 1916, in his article "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", Lenin, in anticipation of an approaching socialist revolution, once more proclaimed the basic principles of the policy on the national and colonial question for all Socialists to follow "both now, during the revolution, and after its victory". Lenin wrote: "They [the Socialists—*Auth.*] must also render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Events in the Balkans and in Persia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, pp. 220-30.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Inflammable Material in World Politics", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, pp. 187-88.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economics", *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 67.

movements for national liberation in these countries and assist their uprising—or revolutionary war, in the event of one—*against* the imperialist powers that oppress them."<sup>1</sup> And it was quite natural that the group of India's national revolutionaries that was in Stockholm at the time should have asked the Bolsheviks, even before they came to power, to prevail upon Kerensky's Provisional Government to instruct its delegate to the Paris Conference of the Entente Powers (which was to meet in November 1917) to speak out in support of the demand for the granting of independence to the peoples of the colonies.<sup>2</sup>

Following the October Revolution, the alliance between the victorious proletariat of Russia and the peoples of the oppressed East became the natural, logical and indispensable sequel to the pre-revolutionary development. In the new conditions, the liberation movements in Asia could get far more support from their allies than from the working class which had not yet come to power. Therefore, the interest of the oppressed peoples in concluding such an alliance was no less, if not greater, than that of the Russian proletariat. And, indeed, there was a real pilgrimage into the Land of Soviets by representatives of the liberation movements of the East after the October Revolution. Chinese, Koreans, Indians, Iranians, Turks and Afghans arrived in Soviet Russia. They came here in order to see with their own eyes the right way of resolving the national question in Russia, to see for themselves the reality of socialist change and to get political and material support for their hard struggle against the colonialists.

The Soviet Government provided the facilities for the coming of representatives from the East, considering contact with them as a practical move towards establishing friendship and cooperation with the national liberation movements of Asia. Here is a typical cable sent by L. M. Karakhan to M. M. Litvinov in Stockholm on November 21, 1918. "Be so kind," Karakhan asked him, "to establish a close relationship with the Indian Committee, informing it that an Indian propaganda centre has been set up in

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, pp. 143, 151-52.

<sup>2</sup> See: A. V. Raikov, *The Awakening of India*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1968, pp. 128-29 (in Russian).

Moscow. For the time being, it has representatives of the Muslim National League [the reference is to Sattar and Jabbar Khairy—*Auth.*], but it is likewise desirable to organise a Hindu centre ... the arrival of such representatives is desirable.”<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the Civil War, economic dislocation and famine, Soviet Russia was doing everything it could to support the national liberation struggle of the peoples of the East. On December 5, 1919, the Seventh All-Russia Congress of Soviets adopted a special resolution “On Oppressed Nations” in which it declared the “full readiness of the Russian workers and peasants to provide both moral and material support for the peoples fighting for their national liberation”.<sup>2</sup>

Representatives of the peoples of the East have more than once spoken and written with gratitude about the immense aid and support the Land of Soviets has given them. Shaukat Usmani, for example, writing about the Indian military courses instituted by the Soviet authorities of Turkestan at the request of Indians, said: “The military academy for Indian revolutionaries set up in Tashkent was a symbol of fraternal assistance that the new land of Socialism extended to the fighters for Indian freedom against British imperialism.”<sup>3</sup> Shaukat Usmani recalled the turbulent days of 1920: “This was a very happy time in the life of these Indians who loved nothing so much as the use of arms to be practised against an enemy who had subjugated and bled Indians for more than three hundred years.”<sup>4</sup>

S. G. Sardesai, member of the Central Secretariat of the National Council of the Communist Party of India, said that none of the Indians who had arrived in Soviet Russia at the time “was disappointed in the Soviet Union. Lenin gave them all the help they could make use of in the cause of Indian freedom.”<sup>5</sup> These words could equally be held to apply to representatives of other national liberation

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: A. I. Yunel, *Soviet-Indian Relations*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1973, pp. 58-59 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *Resolution of the Seventh All-Russia Congress of Soviets*, All-Russia Central Executive Committee Publishers, Moscow, 1920, p. 4 (in Russian).

<sup>3</sup> *Mainstream*, July 15, 1967, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, July 8, 1967, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> S. G. Sardesai, *India and the Russian Revolution*, Communist party Publications, New Delhi, 1967, p. 43. There has been an ut-

movements which appealed to the Soviet Government. We had already referred to the support of the Afghan struggle against British imperialists. And the generous assistance to the national liberation movements in Iran, Turkey, China and other countries is widely known.

Numerous acts by Soviet diplomacy in the area of international affairs to defend the rights and interests of the oppressed peoples of the East were at least of as great importance. Let us recall, for example, that in December 1917, when peace negotiations began with Germany and her allies at Brest-Litovsk, the Committee for Indian Independence in Berlin sent a message to the Soviet delegation, asking it to demand the right of self-determination for the peoples of India. At the very first plenary session of the peace conference, the Soviet delegation stated that the only principles of a universal democratic peace should be those of the Soviet Decree on Peace which declared, in particular, for the right of nations to self-determination. When the talks were suspended on December 16, 1917, the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs appealed to the peoples and governments of the allied nations (Britain, France, Italy and the United States) to cut short military operations and join the peace negotiations. That forceful and impressive document exposed the “most undisguised and most cynical imperialism” of those powers which denied the right of self-determination to the peoples of Ireland, Egypt, India, Madagascar, Indochina and other countries which they oppressed. Soviet Russia called on the governments of those powers “to build peace on the basis of a full and unconditional recognition of the principle of self-determination for all the peoples in all the countries”,

terly unfounded assertion by Arun Coomer Bose (see: *Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1970, pp. 348, 347) that “the efforts of the Indian revolutionaries in Europe to seek Bolshevik help for India’s fight for freedom” thus “ended in frustration”, since the Bolsheviks “were mainly interested in utilising them in their own interest”, while the Indian emigres were but “representatives of nationalist India in exile”. The reference is to the Berlin group of Indian revolutionaries who arrived in Moscow in May 1921 to meet other Indian groups and hold a unity conference with them. But those groups of Indians turned out to be so widely divided that they could not even open the conference. Under such circumstances, the Comintern and the Bolsheviks preferred to continue aiding the groups that had arrived earlier, in the hope that the Indian revolutionaries would eventually achieve unity.

including the oppressed peoples of their own states.<sup>1</sup> This example is seldom recalled.

Other, more substantial acts of the Soviet Government are widely known. These are the Decree on Peace, the Address of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR To All the Toiling Muslims of Russia and the East (November 20, 1917), the Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People approved by the Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets (January 12, 1918), and the message of the Soviet Government to the Chinese people and the governments of South and North China (July 25, 1919), to mention just a few. The documents just listed did not only proclaim the fundamental principles of Soviet foreign policy and, notably, those relating to the national and colonial question. They played an important part as an expression of practical support for the struggle of the peoples of the East to establish their own independent states and to get rid of imperialist oppression.

Naturally, just like in the pre-revolutionary years, the Russian working class which was lending political and material support to the liberation movements of the peoples of Asia found that to be its duty and, of course, "its interest", to quote Lenin's authentic expression.

At the same time, thousands of working people from Eastern countries, who were in Soviet Russia, and, among them, a certain number of Indians, participated in the Civil War on the Soviet side for they felt that in that way they were contributing to the national liberation of their own countries. Many of them, on their return home, brought the truth about the Land of Soviets to their own people and helped generate more sympathy for it in the East and propagate communist ideas among the advanced sections of Eastern societies.

It is safe to say that the national liberation movements of the colonial and dependent countries did much to ensure that the governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey signed treaties establishing friendly relations with Soviet Russia in 1921.

That was how, in the circumstances brought about by

<sup>1</sup> See: *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*, Vol. I, Politizdat, Moscow, 1957, pp. 67-69 (in Russian).

the Great October Revolution, a still more effective and mutually advantageous alliance was virtually being forged between the Russian working class and the national liberation movements of the Eastern countries to oppose international imperialism. In December 1920 Lenin said: "This circumstance, coupled with consolidation of the Soviets, is steadily strengthening the alliance and the friendly relations between Russia and the oppressed nations of the East, despite the bourgeoisie's resistance and intrigues and the continuing encirclement of Russia by bourgeois countries."<sup>1</sup> So, what selfish policy, what "selfish exploitation" of the East can one talk about if one takes an objective and serious view of the matter?!

All of the authors mentioned earlier on, trying to prove the self-seeking character of Bolshevik policy in the East, join in contending that it was not until the middle of 1920 that the policy of cooperating with the bourgeois-democratic, national revolutionary forces of the colonial and dependent countries was enunciated at the Second Congress of the Comintern, and that it was still later that it began to be carried out.

They are all just as unanimous in seeking to prove that the switch-over to such a course was due to the loss of hope for an early victory of socialist revolutions in Western Europe. For example, Professor Harish Kapur writes that the Bolsheviks turned to Asia as late as mid-1920 when they had discovered that there was no chance of an immediate victory by the proletariat in the West. Now, he declared, the Bolsheviks found that they needed "to draw the revolutionary masses of the Asian nations into alliance with the revolutionary workers and peasants of Soviet Russia" so that they "could revive their flagging spirits" with their help.<sup>2</sup>

The same idea has been expressed by Demetrio Boersner. He presumes that "the new tactics of aiding bourgeois nationalist movements directed against the Western colonial powers" arose at the Second Congress of the

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, December 22-29, 1920", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 491.

<sup>2</sup> Harish Kapur, *The Soviet Union and the Emerging Nations. A Case Study of Soviet Policy Towards India*, Michael Joseph, Ltd., Geneva, 1972, pp. 11-12.

Comintern,<sup>1</sup> and began to be applied after the Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku, which met in September 1920. He followed in the footsteps of other writers in asserting that the "new tactics" emerged only after the loss of hope for an early victory of the Western proletariat and the Red Army's retreat from Warsaw. "Only after the end of the Baku Congress," Boersner writes, "and after the Red Army's retreat from Warsaw did the Comintern begin to turn to the East in a national-revolutionary spirit, proposing collaboration with bourgeois nationalists."<sup>2</sup> Boersner goes on to formulate his idea in clearer terms: "The new Comintern policy, based on the failure of the immediate proletarian revolution in the West, consisted in supporting all Eastern governments and political movements which showed a tendency to fight for the complete independence of their country from Western influence."<sup>3</sup>

None of these presumptions tallies with reality. Of course, the arguments about the "flagging spirits" of the Bolsheviks and the hopes they lost in 1920 for an early victory of the proletariat of Western countries, as reasons behind the alleged turn of Communists from Europe to Asia, are utterly inconsistent.

To begin with, there was no turn at all. Lenin and the Bolsheviks had always given much attention to the East, even during the periods of the most significant revolutionary events and gains of the proletarian struggle in the West. Lenin's address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East on November 22, 1919 was very indicative in this respect. That was a period when, to quote Lenin, the social revolution was maturing in Western Europe "by leaps and bounds".<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Lenin reaffirmed the correctness of the propositions set out in the Programme of the RCP(B) to the effect that the forthcoming world social revolution would consist in merging the struggle of the proletariat of all advanced countries against their bourgeois-

<sup>1</sup> See: Demetrio Boersner, *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Demetrio Boersner, *Op. cit.*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, November 22, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 155.

sie with the "national wars" of the colonial and dependent countries "against international imperialism".<sup>1</sup>

In 1920 the international proletariat started to pass from a frontal attack against capitalism to position warfare against it. Lenin described that new situation in his "Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International": "The Communist Parties' current task consists not in accelerating the revolution, but in intensifying the preparation of the proletariat."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks did not totally rule out, even at that time, the possibility of an early victory of the working class in some capitalist countries of Europe (Germany), which Lenin referred to in the Theses. In the meantime, the domestic situation in Soviet Russia was being consolidated. The Civil War was about to be won, and it was precisely in 1920 that Lenin declared that now "we can ... set about a task that is dear to us, an essential task, one that has long been attracting us—that of economic development. We can do so with the assurance that the capitalist tycoons will not find it as easy to frustrate this work as in the past."<sup>3</sup> So, what actually prevailed was not the "flagging spirits" of the Bolsheviks, but an obvious consolidation of Soviet government, not the total loss of hope for a victory of the proletarian revolution in the Western countries, but the surviving hope for a victory by some contingents of West European workers and, finally, it was not a new oriental policy, but a continuation of the former Bolshevik course in Asia.

In June 1920 Lenin restated, in brief, the Bolshevik attitude to the national liberation movement of the Eastern countries, which he first spelled out in early 1916. In an outline of his plan for the theses he was going to write on the national and colonial questions, Lenin again pointed out that a simple recognition of the right of colonies and nations of unequal status to secession was not enough. What was required, he emphasised, was "actual aid to the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, December 22-29, 1920", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 489.

revolutionary struggle and uprising in the colonies",<sup>1</sup> As we see, Lenin's policy statements in November 1919 and in June 1920 reaffirmed the invariable Bolshevik policy of supporting the awakening anti-imperialist nationalism in Eastern countries.

In a bid to justify his argument about the "new course" of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Comintern, Boersner points out that it took Soviet Russia too long to sign all of her early treaties establishing friendly and diplomatic relations with Eastern countries, which she did as late as 1921: on February 26 with Iran, on February 28 with Afghanistan, and on March 16 with Turkey. In that way the author wants to make the readers believe that the Soviet Government was to blame for dragging its feet in signing those treaties because right until the very end of 1920 it had refused to support "moderately nationalist movements".<sup>2</sup> That kind of argument is just as inconsistent.

Starting from October 1917, the Soviet Government carried on a persistent campaign for the establishment of friendly and diplomatic relations with the peoples and governments of Eastern countries. What it had to overcome in the process was not only the resistance of reactionary forces of Eastern countries, but also the direct opposition of the imperialist powers. We can take Iran as a case in point, because Boersner considers it to have been the first object of Soviet Russia's "new policy" of cooperation with moderately nationalist movements.

As early as January 1918, that is barely two and a half months after the October Revolution, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR sent its first official representative, I. O. Kolomiytsev, to Teheran. The Shah's government, fearful of Soviet Russia's revolutionising impact and giving in to pressure from the Entente, not only refused to recognise the Soviet mission, but even connived at the Whiteguards ransacking its premises in November 1918. Considering, however, that the ransacking did not bespeak the will of Iran's nationalist forces, the Soviet Government soon delegated I. O. Kolomiytsev to Teheran once more. But the second attempt at establishing friendly

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Material for the Second Congress of the Communist International", *Complete Works*, Vol. 41, p. 438 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> See: Demetrio Boersner, *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

contact with Iran ended even more tragically than the first one. The Soviet envoy was killed in July 1919 by the Whiteguards instigated by British agents. In spite of that foul crime, the Soviet Government did not give up its efforts to establish contact with Iran. It turned to Teheran over and over again, offering to establish a relationship on a totally new basis—equality, friendship and support for the Iranian people's pursuit of national independence.

Nevertheless, the Soviet-Iranian treaty establishing friendly relations between the two countries was signed as late as 1921, and not in 1918 or 1920, and that was the fault of British imperialism and Iran's reactionary circles, not of the Soviet Government. We shall come to a similar conclusion just as well if we consider the history of Soviet-Turkish, Soviet-Afghan or Soviet-Chinese relations.

It is quite opportune to add at this point that the territory of all Eastern countries adjacent to Russia was used by imperialists as springboards for anti-Soviet armed intervention. There is even more to it, for Turkey before Kemal and China before Sun Yat-sen had participated in the intervention against Soviet Russia. Is it not clear that the time for signing Soviet Russia's treaties of friendship with Eastern countries had come amazingly soon under such circumstances, that being, above all, due to the invariable Soviet policy of backing the nationalist forces of oppressed Asia as well as to the sweeping upsurge of the liberation struggle those forces waged.

That is how one should see one of the essential arguments of Boersner in defence of his thesis about the gradual switch-over of the RCP(B) and the Comintern to a "new course", that is, to supporting the nationalist movements. As he sought to justify that argument further on, Boersner undertook a comparative study of the decisions of the First, Second and Third congresses of the Comintern on the Eastern question. That led him to draw the conclusion: "Instead of the Western tendency which showed itself fully at the First Congress and partly at the Second Congress, and which claimed that the proletariat of the West would revolutionise the East, the ECCI now [before the Third Congress of the Comintern—*Auth.*] stated the opposite: the nationalists of the East would revolutionise the

West!"<sup>1</sup> Right there and then Boersner referred to an ECCI letter "To All Member and Prospective Member Parties of the Comintern", published in April 1921, before the Third Congress which, in his opinion, indicated "the new line—that revolution will be impossible in the West unless it breaks out in the East".

But an analysis of the documents of the First, Second and Third congresses on the national and colonial questions shows the immutability of the basic trends in the Comintern's oriental policy in those years. The First Congress of the Comintern, although proceeding, for quite valid reasons, from the assumption of a possible early victory by the West European proletariat, nevertheless recorded in no uncertain terms in its policy platform, adopted on March 4, 1919, that "it will support the exploited peoples of the colonies in their struggle against imperialism".<sup>2</sup> That assumption, totally ignored, incidentally, by Boersner and other bourgeois authors when they reviewed the decisions of the First Congress on the Eastern question, was further developed and theoretically substantiated in the documents of the Second Congress of the Comintern. The Third Congress stuck to the platform worked out by the Second Congress on the Eastern question.

A review of the role and place of the national liberation movement in the world-wide proletarian revolution also disproves the contentions of our opponents. The First Congress of the Comintern did not raise that question, practically speaking. The surging tide of the national liberation struggle in the East had not yet risen high enough for such an issue to be posed and settled. The Manifesto of the Congress only stressed the decisive role of the anticipated victory of the West European proletariat for the liberation of the East from colonial oppression.<sup>3</sup> But as early as November 1919, when the liberation movement in Asia was in full swing and surged on, with communist elements arising within it, Lenin proposed a solution to that problem addressing the Second Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East. "It is self-evident," Lenin said, "that final victory can be won only

<sup>1</sup> Demetrio Boersner, *Op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> *V. I. Lenin and the Communist International*, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

by the proletariat of all the advanced countries of the world, and we, the Russians, are beginning the work which the British, French or German proletariat will consolidate. But we see that they will not be victorious without the aid of the working people of all the oppressed colonial nations, first and foremost, of Eastern nations." Lenin considered that the "final victory" over imperialism could come only through the interaction and unity of the revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle of the proletarians of the West and the oppressed peoples of the East since "the transition to communism cannot be accomplished by the vanguard alone".<sup>1</sup> Let us note that Lenin expressed that idea at a time when the Bolsheviks were still waiting for an early victory of the West European proletariat.

The Second Congress of the Comintern included Lenin's thesis in its resolutions. The Supplementary Theses, edited by Lenin, contained this important statement: "In order to ensure the final success of the world revolution, there has to be joint action ... by two forces"—the international proletariat and the anti-imperialist liberation movement of the oppressed nations.<sup>2</sup> In full agreement with that proposition, the ECCI letter "To All the Proletarian Organisations" pointed out: "Without a revolution in Asia there can be no victory of a world proletarian revolution."<sup>3</sup> In other words, there is no whole without its parts: there is no final victory over imperialism without victory in the East. The Third Congress of the Comintern proclaimed the same idea, by and large. The theses on the world situation and the tasks before the Communist International said: "The revolutionary people's movement in India and other colonies has now become as essential to the world revolution as the uprising of the proletariat in the capitalist countries in the Old and New worlds."<sup>4</sup> There was no "new line" supposed to be in pursuit of the priority and primacy of the Asian revolution to be found there, nor any renunciation of support for the national liberation movement in the East.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, November 22, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, pp. 161-62.

<sup>2</sup> See: *V. I. Lenin and the Communist International*, p. 203.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

So, the policy of backing the national liberation movements, bourgeois-democratic and anti-imperialist in character, the policy of alliance with them was invariably pursued by the Bolsheviks before, during and after the October Revolution. There was no break in the pursuit of that course, nor any departure from it either by the Bolsheviks or by the Comintern. It is quite clear, therefore, that the policy of supporting the national liberation movements could in no way have "stemmed" from the Second Congress and, for that reason, cannot be called a new tactic in point of principle. Of all the tactical guidelines of the Bolsheviks, it was, perhaps, the oldest one and underwent no change in spite of the succession of the strategic stages of the Russian revolution.

However, it is exactly the immutability of that course that does not suit our opponents because it demolishes their concept of the "selfishness" of the Soviet and Comintern policy towards the liberation movements of the East. Claiming that the Comintern and the Bolsheviks had not been supporting such movements until the middle and even the end of 1920, bourgeois authors, naturally, had to establish what policy, preceding that change-over, was pursued from 1917 to 1920.

The above-mentioned authors differ in their answers to this question. To take the version of Harish Kapur, Zafar Imam or an Indian specialist on the history of the USSR Doctor J. A. Naik, the Bolsheviks had shown practically no interest in the East until 1920, being totally preoccupied with the West. Their Eastern policy was passive. That is also the view of two French historians—Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Quelquejay. In a joint work on the Muslim national movements in Russia, they write: "During that period, which was one of 'War Communism', the faith in the triumph of the revolution in the West was still profound and the leaders of the Bolshevik Party showed but indirect interest in the East".<sup>1</sup> In Harish Kapur's opinion, until mid-1920 the Bolsheviks had taken "only a theoretical interest in Asia" or simply issued "appeals to the Asian

<sup>1</sup> Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Quelquejay, *Les mouvements nationaux chez les musulmans de Russie. Le "Sultangalievisme" au Tatarstan*, Mouton and Co., Paris, 1960, p. 126.

people to revolt against their internal and external oppressors".<sup>1</sup> Dr. Naik even figured out to discover that Lenin had never mentioned India or the national and colonial question for that matter in his eight reports and speeches on the international situation between May and November 1918 (why he took that particular period of time, rather than any other, remains a mystery). In his opinion, neither the invitation that was sent to various workers' organisations abroad to associate themselves with the Communist International, nor its First Congress held in March 1919 dealt with the national and colonial question.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the above-mentioned authors, Boersner presumes that not even during the period of a revolutionary upsurge in the West were the Comintern and the Russian Communists by any means passive in the East. Just on the contrary. In Asia, too, they pursued a particularly vigorous policy at the time, he finds. That policy, however, consisted not in supporting the national liberation movements but in aiding the "ultra-leftist rebellions" designed to develop quickly into social revolutions. He writes: "Already in the middle of 1920, the old communist policy of supporting ultra-left rebellions in the Eastern countries was slowly yielding to the new tactics of aiding bourgeois nationalist movements directed against the Western colonial powers."<sup>3</sup>

One will hardly quarrel with the idea that the Bolsheviks had been active enough in the East even before the Second Congress of the Comintern. However, they did not follow the course over there which Boersner writes about. They stuck to their policy of supporting the struggle of the oppressed peoples for their national independence. However, ultra-revolutionary tactics did exist, and an attempt was even made to pursue it, but it was made not by Lenin and the Comintern but by certain early Communists of Eastern countries infected with the "infantile disorder of leftism". Bourgeois authors, and Boersner among them, totally ignore that very important circumstance just as they ignore the fact that Lenin strongly opposed the attempts

<sup>1</sup> Harish Kapur, *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> J. A. Naik, *Soviet Policy Towards India. From Stalin to Brezhnev*, Vikas Publications, Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore, 1970, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Demetrio Boersner, *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

to pursue left-sectarian tactics in the East. Without taking all that into account, it is simply impossible to understand many of the developments in the Comintern and in the communist movement of the Asian nations.

Boersner tries to justify his argument by referring to the Gilan revolution of 1920-1921 in North Iran. It is the events connected with it that he believes to have been a manifestation of the Bolshevik policy of supporting the "ultra-left rebellions".<sup>1</sup> But the Gilan revolution was not such a rebellion. It was a national liberation movement by peasants, the urban poor, tradesmen and liberal-minded landowners against British rule and its henchmen in Iran. And that revolution aborted largely because the leftist elements, then prevalent in the Central Committee of the Iranian Communist Party, attempted to set the Gilan movement on course towards socialist reforms contrary to the actual conditions and Lenin's explicit warning against "left" stupidities.<sup>2</sup>

Neither is there any valid reason behind the opposite claims about the passivity and even inaction of Soviet Russia in the East during the years immediately preceding the Second Congress of the Comintern. In reality, the oriental policy of the Soviet Communists was then very active as well, and not only in the sense of diplomatic and political action in support of the national liberation struggle of the Eastern countries and peoples, but also in the sense of spreading communist ideology among a million-odd working people of Eastern countries who were in Soviet Russia at the time. The Central Committee of the RCP(B) and other Party bodies of Soviet Russia were setting up special political agencies to conduct propaganda and agitation work among them and rouse them to communist activity. The leading group of the Central Bureau of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East began to work in January 1918. In March 1919 the Second Siberian Conference of the RCP(B) decided to "organise an information and agitation bureau in the Far East", and later on a

<sup>1</sup> Demetrio Boersner, *Op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> See: ORCSA, s. 5402, r. 1, f. 34, pp. 3, 9. For details see: S. L. Agayev and V. N. Plastun, "From the History of Drafting the Programme and Tactics of the Iranian Communist Party in 1920-1921", *Narody Azii i Afriki*, No. 3, 1976.

Section of the Eastern Peoples was set up under the auspices of the Siberian Bureau of the RCP(B) Central Committee. The Far Eastern Bureau of the RCP(B) Central Committee had an Organisational Bureau of Chinese Communists and a Korean Bureau.

The same kind of work was carried on in Turkestan. In 1919 the Turkestan Commission of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee formed a special agitation and propaganda subdivision which was later transformed into a Council for International Propaganda. Here is how the Council formulated the tasks before it: "To establish links which would connect the revolution in Russia with the movement of the oppressed masses of the East; to make the slogans proclaimed by the proletariat of Russia accessible and comprehensive to the working masses of Persia, India, Bukhara, etc."<sup>1</sup>

A large amount of oral and printed propaganda work was carried on by the Odessa Regional RCP(B) Committee among the working people of Turkish and Iranian extraction.

Soviet Communists did a great deal (notably by organising propaganda courses and schools) in order to help the more politically conscious elements in the Eastern countries get down to establishing their national communist groups. In that way they contributed towards extending the communist movement into the Asian countries adjacent to Soviet Russia. This work cannot be called "passive" or taken to mean "ignoring" the East, but neither could it be seen as instigating "ultra-left rebellions".

Starting from 1918, the communist movement began to spread fairly rapidly among the working people of the Eastern countries in Soviet Russia. Former Turkish POWs set up several communist groups, and even a Central Committee of the Turkish Party of Socialists-Communists was formed. Many Iranian Adalat communist groups appeared in Turkestan in 1919, and there were such groups also in Central Russia as well as in Azerbaijan and Daghestan. There were Chinese, Koreans and a certain number of Indians among the people actively

<sup>1</sup> *The Comintern and the East*, Moscow, 1979, p. 88.

involved in the communist movement which grouped thousands of foreign workers in the Soviet Republic. Communist groups were cropping up in Eastern countries themselves at the same time. These two communist trends—in exile and at home—started to converge and to merge early in 1920. The formation of national Communist parties began in Turkey, Iran, China, Korea and other Asian countries.

So, what emerged in the Eastern countries in 1919-1920 under the impact of the October Revolution was an entirely new factor of their social existence—a communist movement. The emergence and development of that movement in the East took place in the context of a yet unmatched sweeping upsurge of the national liberation struggle of oppressed peoples in the Asian continent. Anti-imperialist action was assuming increasingly massive proportions, with more workers and peasants being drawn in the struggle against colonialism. That was the starting point of the convergence of the communist and the national liberation movements, and that, naturally, generated an unprecedented problem of their relationship and interaction inside the Eastern countries.

It was not a simple problem. The national liberation movement, led by the local bourgeoisie, had originated a long time before and, fitting in perfectly with the anti-colonial aspirations of nearly all the classes of Eastern societies, represented a large and comparatively well-organised force by that time. The communist movement, on the other hand, was in its infancy, handicapped by those hard times: it did not strike root in the working-class movement, was especially fiercely persecuted by the colonial authorities and, besides, was weakened in a number of countries by the left-sectarian outlook of its own leadership.

Back in November 1919, Lenin indicated a course to be followed in developing cooperation of Eastern Communists with the forces of anti-imperialist and bourgeois-democratic nationalism, overcoming left-sectarian ambitions and applying communist ideology and organisation to the specific conditions of the backward East and making an all-out effort to create an anti-imperialist alliance of all the revolutionary liberation movements of Asia with

the international proletariat, above all, with the Soviet Republic.

It became clear by the end of 1919, not any earlier, that the “old” national and colonial question had taken on new and essential aspects because of the rising communist movement in the Eastern countries themselves. Naturally, therefore, it had to be considered at the nearest international forum of Communists, which was the Second Congress of the Comintern.

The issue could not have been debated in every detail at the First Congress (March 1919), because it was not yet ripe enough to be considered. The communist groups in the East were still of little note, the problem of correlation between the communist and national liberation movements in the colonial and dependent countries had not yet arisen. Besides, the First Congress, to recall Lenin’s description, was no more than a propaganda effort, for all it did was to put forward the basic ideas for the proletariat to follow and urge it to rise. That was the approach it adopted in dealing with the national and colonial question as well. The main task before the Second Congress was to work out the fundamental theoretical principles to guide the strategy and tactics of the world communist movement in the West and in the East.

There is only one thing that is true in the assertions of the above-mentioned bourgeois writers: it was at the Second Congress that the first all-embracing debate on the Eastern question took place in the Comintern, but that was not because of any loss of hope for an early victory of the European proletariat, nor because of a turn of the Bolsheviks from the “fading” West to the inflamed East. The reasons were different. For one thing, it was necessary for the “old” policy the Bolsheviks had tried out in supporting the national liberation movements in the East to be ratified by the international organisation of Communists, to be carried forward and to become a policy of all Communist parties. For another, it was necessary to discuss the new question of the correlation between the communist and national liberation movements in the Asian countries themselves and to settle it with due regard for the actual social and economic condi-

tions of the colonial East.

So, the anti-communist guidelines have constrained many foreign scholars to construct unprovable theories totally at variance with objective reality. Unfortunately, this applies to a number of works in Indian bourgeois historiography which, generally, is more objective in its assessment of the history of the origin of the communist movement in that country as well as of the oriental policies of Soviet Russia and the Comintern.