

THE CONGRESS PARTY MAKES A BID TO THE LEFT

By Kailas Chandra

The Indian National Congress party at its recent Sixty-eighth Session at Bhubaneswar "formally" accepted democratic socialism as its goal, a goal which it has preached for the last ten years. The Congress party has defined what it claims to be a "concrete programme" for realising that goal of socialism. The newly elected Congress president, Kamaraj, followed this up in his presidential address with an appeal to all those who had faith in the "ideology of socialism and democracy" to join the Congress in the "common task of building of a new society on the basis of this ideology instead of frittering away their energies in small groups and organisations."

This seems to have created a flutter among sections in the traditional left parties in India, particularly in the Praja Socialist party [PSP] and the Communist party of India [CPI]. Asoka Mehta, former chairman of the PSP, who has already accepted a cushy job as vice-chairman of the Planning Commission, has been urging his followers to seek new "areas of cooperation with the Congress." He has been suggesting that all who believe in democratic socialism must join the ruling Congress to "strengthen the hands of Prime Minister Nehru and democratic socialists within the Congress."

The PSP leadership has answered this appeal by expelling Mehta for defying party discipline. But it is now certain that a section of the PSP leadership associated with Mehta will eventually join the Congress.

The Central Executive Committee [CEC] of the CPI, which met in New Delhi after the Bhubaneswar session of the Congress, likewise reacted with enthusiasm to what it termed the "emergency of democratic forces" within and outside the Congress. It also praised the rising "forces of the left in the Indian National Congress" and assured its ranks that it was looking forward to "unity of the progressive forces within the Congress with those outside." The CEC resolution in fact said that "never since the Independence have the possibilities of such unity been so great and the need so desperately urgent."

This is supposed to be a part of the strategy of Communist party leader S. A. Dange in seeking an alliance with the "progressive Indian bourgeoisie" against the reactionary right wing of the Congress.

All these pronouncements by traditional "left" parties have created a great deal of confusion in the working-class movement as a whole about the precise class role of the Congress in India.

No Shift in Sight

In fact the deliberations at Bhubaneswar and the subsequent developments "inside and outside the Congress" do not give any indi-

ocation of any fundamental shift in the policies of the bourgeois leadership of the Congress.

In the first place it is totally fallacious to think that the so-called "left or democratic forces" within the Congress, led by middle-class radicals like Krishna Menon, K. D. Malavia or Biju Patnaik scored a victory at Bhubaneshwar. These leaders, in frustration over the dominant right-wing leadership of the Congress, did make radical speeches, did denounce monopoly capitalism and even demanded such radical measures as nationalisation of banking and state trading in food grains. But theirs was a cry in the wilderness.

K. D. Malavia moved a resolution urging the Congress government to nationalize banking and introduce state trading in food grains, but he had to withdraw his resolution lest it might be rejected by an overwhelming majority of the delegates had it been pressed for a vote. The new Working Committee elected by the delegates did not include any nominee of the so-called Congress "left." Malaviya who was put up as the only effective candidate on behalf of the "left" was defeated. Krishna Menon who was supposed to have been nominated to the Working Committee by the Congress president was also left out of the highest policy-making body of the Congress.

It was explained later that this "temporary defeat of the left" was due to the illness of Prime Minister Nehru who had a stroke and could not participate in the deliberations. This says nothing about the real alignment of forces within the Congress today. In fact the Congress leadership is held more securely than ever by the right wingers, trusted by the big bourgeoisie of India. The periodic debates that take place among Congressmen about the "building of democratic socialism," also in the context of the unseemly scrambles for power among the regional party leaders in different states, does not really pose any threat to the capitalist class in the country.

There might be at best an awareness on the part of Congress leadership of the growing crisis in the economic and political spheres. In fact the "ideological disputes" among the Congress leaders reflect the disputes between different strata of the Indian bourgeoisie on how best to tide over the present crisis, in the larger interests of the capitalist class as a whole. The Call, the New Delhi journal of the Revolutionary Socialist party points out, "Socialism in Congress parlance has been a label for selling state monopoly capitalism to the toiling masses in India and for keeping their democratic and class yearnings in proper check."

"From Bhubaneshwar where the Congress held its 68th session to New Delhi, seat of Indian Parliament, the road is apparently a long one," thus complained the pro-Nehru weekly Link of New Delhi (February 16). It said ruefully: "When Parliament began its budget session on Monday [February 10], the usual 'curtain-raisers' scarcely made mention of the Bhubaneshwar spirit or how the Bhubaneshwar decisions might influence attitudes and statements of policy in the House."

Some Pertinent Questions

Link, as the mouthpiece of the Congress "left" posed these meaningful questions: "How is the Government going to implement the inspiring pledges made in the resolution on Democracy and Socialism? How are the promises to restrict property and privilege, to reduce economic disparities and assure a minimum standard of living for all, to check concentration of economic power and eliminate business malpractices, to complete land reforms, going to be fulfilled? Expectations among the people that the first session of Parliament after Bhubaneswar would give some indications of the beginnings of a more decisive turn towards socialism were not unjustified. Many of the steps suggested in the Bhubaneswar resolution were meant not for a distant transition towards a socialist state but for immediate application to cure many economic ills and check undesirable tendencies which if allowed to grow could become serious obstacles to socialist progress."

But even the Link did not fail to notice that the address by Vice-President Zakir Hussain, discharging the functions of the president, to the joint meeting of the two houses of parliament "made no reference to the socialist pledges made at Bhubaneswar. The reference to socialism in the address or to radical economic measures was no more than routine.

"In spite of difficulties and distractions," the address said, "we have continued to move forward towards our objective of a democratic and socialist order at home and for peace and cooperation in international affairs."

In the opinion of Link, however, "If the public debate in the period between the Jaipur AICC session and the Bhubaneswar Congress is a true guide to public opinion in the country, it can be taken only as showing a wide measure of dissatisfaction over the slow pace of economic progress and particularly towards the socialist objective."

Squabble over Nehru's Crown

The disillusionment of the petty-bourgeois radicals at the growing disparity between the promises and the performances of the Congress leadership cannot be described any better. Yet the clamour among these petty-bourgeois radicals to crowd into the Congress party, to share the fishes and loaves of office and participate in the mad scramble for power and factional struggles among Congressmen in different states, does not seem to have abated. This enthusiasm for Congress entry cannot be explained by any serious "ideological" or "principle political" considerations.

In fact the illness of Nehru at the age of seventy-five has raised the problem of his succession. Within the Congress party itself, torn by regional loyalties, there is an unseemly race for succession, but no agreement about the successor. There is a contro-

versy around every Congress leader of national stature from the extreme right wingers like Morarji Desai and S. K. Patil to the so-called "leftists" like Krishna Menon and K. D. Malaviya.

There are many radical intellectuals like Asoka Mehta and Jayaprakash Narayan (who once renounced politics to orient toward the supra-class sarvodaya movement) and others who entertain the grand illusion that with their past "halo" of socialism they can step into the shoes of Nehru to serve the needs of the Indian bourgeoisie. For the lesser fry in the "radical" movement there are many cushy jobs that attract them to "democratic socialism."

The scramble over the succession to Nehru explains much about the changes and shifts in the left movement today. The fundamental problem, however, is whether the leadership of the Indian bourgeoisie, which has exhausted all possibilities of doping the masses with false promises of "democratic socialism," can really resolve its political crisis by infusing "outside socialist blood" into the Congress.

Neither Prime Minister Nehru, with his great personality, nor any successor who might succeed him can provide an effective answer to the unprecedented crisis and a truly explosive situation emerging in the country within the framework of capitalism. What is needed is a revolutionary settlement of accounts with an outmoded capitalist system and what is delaying such a final settlement of accounts is the lack of revolutionary working-class leadership.