Imperialism and Indian Nationalism.

By M. N. Roy (Moscow).

The annual meeting of the Indian National Congress has passed a resolution declaring complete independence to be its ultimate aim. The practical significance of this resolution is not so great as it may appear on the face of it. Nevertheless, the fact remains that for the first time, since its foundation forty-two years ago, the National Congress has made such a declaration. It is to be read only as the weather signal. Even in the stormiest days of its existence, namely in 1920/22, when the country was in the throes of a powerful mass movement, the National Congress persistently refused to define its object as the attainment of complete independence. The most radical expression of its demand was the Gandhists formula, self-government “within the Empire if possible and without if necessary” to be attained by “all legitimate means”, and the cult of Gandhism tabooed any action as “illegitimate” which did not comply with its strict dictum of non-violence. Later on, Das, who replaced Gandhi as the leader of the National Congress, definitely defined Indian nationalist aspiration as “equal partnership within the British Empire”. In doing so he made the theory that membership of a great federation of free nations was a higher ideal than the isolation of national independence. In view of the fact that the National Congress, in all essentials, still remains wedded to the social conservatism of Gandhi and the political reformism of Das, its declaration as regards independence has no practical value.

Although neither the National Congress nor any of the individual nationalist parties ever declared officially in favour of independence as its goal, there existed an under-current in that direction. This was among the petty bourgeois intelligentsia who, however, idealized Gandhi and Das and followed them, although these sternly disapproved of their sentimental extravaganza as regards independence and romantic inclination fo-
Towards futile terrorism. The demand for national independence was never given the form of a political programme by the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. It was not popularised and the masses, to gain their support in the struggle for it. A programme of national revolution placed before the National Congress by the communists in 1922 and persistently propagated since then, won but partial approval of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. It was not adopted by the Congress; but did not have the courage openly to press this demand upon the National Congress; for that would require revolt against their idols, Gandhi and Das. The necessity of armed struggle as the means to national independence, manifested itself in the programme and its demands also appealed to their imagination; but they did not agree with the communist exposition of the cult of non-violence as counter-revolutionary, believing in the superiority of the “spiritual culture” of India which was able to accomplish something different from the experience in the ‘materialist West’. They did not understand that armed uprising must be connected with a revolutionary mass movement. As a matter of fact, they entirely disagreed with the communists as regards the social programme of the national revolution. Consequently their demand for independence was never entered the realm of practical politics. It could be dealt with summarily by the bourgeois leaders in every annual meeting of the Congress behind the scene.

This year the bourgeois directors of the National Congress have allowed the chorus of petty bourgeois intelligentsia to sing out of tune. Considered as an act of the Congress, a leaf of bourgeois history, the resolution is a mere put up with the object of terrorising the imperialist rulers. Even as such it is naive; because imperialism cannot be terrorised so easily. A resolution was adopted declaring that independence is the ultimate goal of the National Congress; but not a word is said as regards how this goal will be reached and what will be the nature of the independent national state. Thus it is but an expression of wish. The bourgeois leaders made this much concession to their petty bourgeois followers, because the latter’s services are needed in the construction of boycott. The Royal Commission boycott was a very poor show, if it is practised only by those who will be asked to appear before the Commission to express their views as regards the constitutional progress of India. The number of those directly concerned with the work of the Commission does not exceed a couple of thousand—the representatives of the landowning and capitalist classes. A considerable portion of these have declared against boycott. Some of those, who are now talking of boycott, will climb down eventually. So the prospect of boycott, as such, is not very heartening. The leaders talk nowadays of an indifferent attitude towards the threatened boycott. For example, a few days before the National Congress formally passed the resolution to boycott the Royal Commission, the British government of a province, addressing the provincial parliament, advised their leaders to take the least view of the situation and pointed out that the proposed boycott would not hinder the work of the Commission.

On the other hand, past experience leaves the nationalist masses very lukewarm about boycott. The fiasco of the Non-co-operation movement is still fresh in their memory. But to give the boycott the appearance of the expression of a national protest, it is necessary to secrete at least some hearty demonstration of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. Besides, if necessary, their services may be utilised to stir up the masses, but to sabotage the movement whenever it will threaten to exceed the desired limit, as was done in the previous occasion. By the resolution of the Madras Congress the bourgeois leaders recover the confidence of their petty bourgeois following, thus obstructing their deviation towards revolutionary alliance with the masses. At the same time, the petty bourgeois intelligentsia, thus saved from revolution, will lend some mass appearance to their movements. This business the imperialist will take advantage of and build up his reactionary character as the leader of the masses. In other words, will fizzle out in a fiasco, as the Non-co-operation, unless it is used as the lever for developing a revolutionary mass struggle against imperialism; but this cannot be expected from the nationalist bourgeoisie, who are not serious even about the boycott.

By the insincere policy of imperialism the bourgeois nationalists are placed in a very uncomfortable situation. They must make a show of opposition in order to save their face. Not only the big bourgeois parties of the right, but even the petty bourgeois Swaraj (Congress) Party during the last two mishaps adjusted its activities to prepare “favourable atmosphere” for the grant of a further instalment of reform by the early appointment of the Statutory Commission provided for in the Reform Act of 1919. The general policy of bourgeois nationalism was to hold up the olive branch expecting that they would meet it half-way. The revolutionary mass movement, which had lent such a potentiality to the boycott of the first reforms seven years ago, was destroyed by a consciously counter-revolutionary policy. Every form of revolutionary activity was denigrated and condemned. Mass agitation was replaced by parliamentary obstruction as the main method of national struggle. Even parliamentary obstruction was gradually abandoned so as to create an atmosphere of peace and good-will. The revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ movement was directly opposed to a revolution; to a political party. All these counter-revolutionary preparations were made on the speculation over a further instalment of reform which would save bourgeois nationalism from utter bankruptcy and give to the native bourgeoisie some political rights in addition to the considerable economic concessions already made. But they mis-calculated the situation. The policy of imperialism is economic concession, but political suppression. Imperialism can afford to make some economic concessions to the Indian bourgeoisie (it is forced to do so by its internal crisis) only in case it maintains a political supremacy. To understand the ground upon which this fundamental principle of imperialist policy created in the Indian bourgeois nationalist movement the illusion of “equal partnership inside the Empire”. Now it has become brutally clear that the reformist programme of bourgeois nationalism cannot reach a positive goal. The Congress (formerly Swaraj) Party, which for several years veiled its programme of compromise with imperialist domination in return for some concessions to native capitalism, in parliamentary obstruction, stands exposed in its native impotence. The resolution of the Madras Congress is only a strange to hide this total political bankruptcy.

The crux of the situation lies elsewhere. It is to be found in the remarkable leftward swing of the Trade Union Congress. This has also declared in favour of boycott. In view of the fact that the working class have no direct concern with the Royal Commission; since as a class their views will not be consulted, the decision of the Trade Union Congress has but one implication, namely, that the working class enter the struggle against imperialism as an independent political force. This gives the new boycott movement potentially much more a revolutionary significance than the previous, when the working class was used by the bourgeoisie to form the framework, and not instead of a reactionary petty bourgeoisie. When, six years back, the revolutionary upheaval of the workers’ and peasants’ masses made the nationalist movement a powerful challenge to imperialist domination and brought it nearly down (the bourgeois nationalist leaders themselves testify to this), this negative slogan must be supplemented by positive demands. They have begun the agitation for the election of a Constituent
Assembly which should decide the political future of India. If the National Congress and the individual bourgeois parties accept this proposal, a very broad anti-imperialist front will be created and the boycott will not fizzle out as in the previous occasion, but will be the lever to develop a mighty mass movement to realise the desire expressed in the Madras Congress. But there is sufficient reason to doubt that the bourgeoisie will participate in such a revolutionary struggle. Even the petty bourgeois intelligentsia cannot be fully relied upon. Apart from the lessons of the past, the statements made by bourgeois nationalist leaders inside and outside the country warrant such doubt. For example, the Congress leader, Motilal Nehru (who, by the way, stayed away from this year’s session obviously in order not to commit himself one way or the other) appeared before the General Council of the League against Imperialism held in Brussels on Dec., 9–11, to express bitter disappointment at the behaviour of the British Labour Party. But at the same time, to disassociate himself from any possible revolutionary significance of his action, he took great care to explain that he did not belong to that section of the Nationalist movement which desired separation from the British Empire. When at the end of the same month, on the motion of his son, the National Congress declared independence as its goal, the old Nehru sat in England looking out for an opening to begin negotiation with Birkenhead with the object of tiding over the crisis. Whenever such an opening will be available he will tell British imperialism: “don’t take the young chaps at home seriously, I will know how to manage them.”

But the real struggle is not held up by the compromise-seeking bourgeois politicians. The workers have begun it. The Municipal Workers’ Union of Bombay (where the Royal Commission will first touch Indian soil) has decided to strike on the day of the commission’s arrival. The British authorities instantly challenged the legality of the strike, but in remarkable contrast to previous experience, the head of the Union, who belongs to the Workers’ and Peasants’ Party, declared that the workers would strike disregarding the threat of dismissal and prosecution. Very likely the harbour workers and eventually the railwaymen will follow the lead, beginning a real struggle in spite of the counter-revolutionary bourgeois nationalist parties.

For Bolshevik Unity, for Bolshevik Discipline.

By E. Yaroslavsky

On all questions the resolutions of the 15th Party Congress of the C.P.S.U. were adopted unanimously. This unanimity of an enormous Congress convened after two years of fierce struggle against the Opposition, two years of sharpest attacks on the Party, on its leadership, on its principles showed extraordinary Party solidarity and Leninist firmness. We had no doubt whatever but that the Opposition would make some manoeuvres or other both before and during the Congress. These manoeuvres were, as always, intended to confuse some of the Party members, to foster vacillations on the question of various determined measures in relation to the Opposition, the question of organisational conclusions in particular.

Precisely because the struggle was carried on by the Party on the basis of sound principles the ideological insolveney of the Opposition has become clear to the whole Party since the XV. Congress. This was the reason why the demand that the Opposition should completely disarm ideologically met with such unanimous support on the part of the whole Party. But the Opposition did its utmost to convince the Party that it must be completely disarmed not only ideologically but also organisationally. However, when it is a question of determined organisational deductions in relation to several scores or hundreds of Party members, who at times played an important role in the life of our Party and the Soviet Government in various periods of our history,—hesitation would be possible in any other Party, but not in Lenin’s Party, not in the Bolshevik Party, resulting in a rotten compromise by the Opposition. Clearly, the Opposition looked forward to such a rotten compromise in making various statements every time the Party demanded a reply, which resulted in such declarations as that of October 16, 1926 and August 8, 1927.

Before arriving at such determinate conclusions which the Party arrived at the XV. Congress in relation to the Opposition, the Party tried absolutely every other method of settling the question. What for instance, did the Party demand from the Opposition on the eve of November 7th? It merely demanded the preservation of Party discipline, abandonment of the idea of street anti-Party and anti-Soviet action, cessation of illegal meetings, renunciation of carrying the inner Party controversy outside of the Party. The Presidium of the C.C.C. asked the Opposition whether they agreed to submit to this Party demand or not. Yes, or no, was the question. Instead of giving direct answers the Opposition gave indirect answers twice,— both times, as they themselves said, at the point of the revolver, i.e. when the Party threatened them with expulsion.

The anti-Party and anti-Soviet activities of the Opposition resulted in the fact that many of their prominent active leaders were found to be outside of the Party at the time of the XV. Congress. Their fate depended on their behaviour at the Congress. The Congress could not formulate any other demand from the Opposition but one, namely, their complete ideological and organisational disarmament. It was clear to the Opposition that this formula, given by Comrade Stalin in his report, was the demand of the whole Party. On December 3rd, the Opposition, aware of what the Party demanded, sent a statement to the Presidium of the XV. Congress which naturally could not satisfy the Congress. The special commission in charge of the Opposition affairs had at its disposal material which incontrovertibly bore out the fact that the Opposition created an apparatus of another Party. Instead of recognising this fact, instead of recognising the existence of the Trotskyist central, regional, provincial and district committees, instead of dissolving them immediately, the Opposition tried to obscure this main fact by all kinds of reservations and to picture it as a comparatively innocent affair. The Opposition said:

“in the struggle for our views we have entered the path of factionalism, which sometimes assumed extremely acute forms and in several cases resorted to methods countering Party discipline.”

As if the entire Opposition activity since the XIV. Congress was not pure mockery over Party discipline and was not directed towards the creation of a second Party! Instead of condemning openly and in a Bolshevik manner this anti-Party activity, the statement reads as if the Party is to blame for the fact that the Opposition selected the anti-Party path. The Party, you see, put “obstacles” in the way of the Opposition in advocating their anti-Party views; the Party advanced against the Opposition “accusations unbearable for Bolsheviks.” At that moment, the Opposition still had the chance to take an open and sincere step towards condemning their whole anti-Party line and anti-Party activity, and those steps would perhaps have influenced the Congress to refrain from the determined organisational deductions which it drew later. Instead of doing that the Opposition declared: