

XIII. THE ROLE OF THE PROLETARIAT IN THE NATIONAL REVOLUTION

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The historic significance of the events of the last year, particularly of the last months, is that they bring out the working class as the driving force of the national revolution. Ever since 1919, when the nationalist movement became a mass movement, the workers and peasants played an important role in it. But reformer bourgeois leadership systematically obstructed a full and free play of the revolutionary mass energy; and petty bourgeois noisiness sought to belittle the role of the working class. The tactics of the nationalist leaders were to use the awakened masses as pawns in their game for petty concessions and reforms.

Such a relation of classes is not the peculiarity of the Indian revolution. All the revolutions of modern history were fought and won by the masses. But except in the case of the Russian revolution, the leadership was with other classes who, consequently appropriated all the fruits of the revolution. Naturally, the Indian bourgeoisie believe and hope that such will also be the case in India and it could not be otherwise, had not Indian revolution been taking place in national and international conditions entirely different from those obtaining in the epoch of the bourgeois democratic revolutions in Europe. In the present conditions, of the country as well as of the world, the roles played respectively by different classes in the Indian revolution are bound to be very much different from the roles of the corresponding classes in the bourgeois democratic revolutions of the past, although the social character of the Indian national revolution is bourgeois democratic. The working class is not only the main fighting factor of the Indian revolution; it is the *driving force*. It not only pushes other classes in the revolutionary struggle; but prepares itself to assume the leadership of the democratic national revolution in its decisive stages.

The recent events herald appearance of the proletariat on the political scene in this role of potential leader. The

high degree of class-consciousness and will to fight developed in the great industrial struggles of the last year, qualified the proletariat for the independent political action in Calcutta on December 28. The historic significance of the Calcutta demonstration cannot be exaggerated. It is a landmark in the history of the Indian revolution. It brought out the proletariat not only as the driving force, but also as the potential leader of the revolution. Only after a month, in Colombo and Bombay, the proletariat demonstrated its fitness for the leadership of the revolution, the claim to which was asserted in Calcutta. When the nationalist bourgeoisie were irrationally seeking a strategic retreat into the camp of counter-revolution and petty bourgeois radicalism was cowed by imperialist sabrerattling, the proletariat in Colombo and Bombay challenged the power of the state and proved that, organised on a widescale under revolutionary leadership, mass-action can defy and ultimately overcome the formidable forces of oppression. It should not be forgotten that Colombo was practically ruled by the workers for three days. As the Anglo-Cylonese press complained, "the government abdicated its power to the Labour Union". This is a victory unparalleled in the history of Indian revolution; and it was won by the proletariat. Police forces had to be completely withdrawn on the demand of the Labour Union which took over control of the city. Even military forces could not face the revolutionary masses. It was only with the aid of the reformist leader, Gunasinha, that the government could recover the control of the situation. But the fact that the state had to hide its instruments of power, and operated through the popular leader, is highly significant. The lesson of the events of Colombo is not the popularity of Gunasinha, but the power of the masses. Pitted against this power, the popularity of a non-revolutionary leader will be eventually swept away like broken reed.

Not such an easy victory crowned the proletarian uprising in Bombay, owing to the circumstances of the situation. But class-solidarity, courage and determination demonstrated by the proletariat are veritably classical. It was the first real trial of strength between revolution and

counter-revolution. In this historic encounter the proletariat had to meet alone the united forces of foreign imperialism and native reaction. The Bombay proletariat did not go to the barricade to win the revolution in one blow. It was the prelude to the great drama. In the prelude the proletariat played its part most creditably. It was the blood-baptism of the leader of the revolution. By glorious martyrdom the proletariat have placed themselves at the front rank of the revolutionary army.

An examination of the events of the period intervening between the Calcutta demonstration and the Colombo and Bombay uprisings, makes the historic significance of these evident. The Calcutta demonstration may be compared with the insurrection of the Parisian proletariat in the first days of June 1793, during the Great French revolution. Inside the national convention there was a protracted struggle between the Girondins and Jacobins for power. The later, while representing the radical elements of the rising bourgeoisie, were backed up by the Parisian proletariat. Their leaders (the best and most classical types of bourgeois revolutionaries) could not agree upon the necessity of ruthlessly attacking the Girondins (who represented big capitalist and land-owning interests, and were seeking compromise with the overthrown monarchy) as the only means of saving the revolution. In that critical moment, the Parisian proletariat, victors of July 14 (1789) and August 10 (1792)—once again intervened in the situation to force the wavering radical bourgeoisie further towards the ultimate victory of the revolution. On May 31 (1793) they marched to the endlessly debating convention, besieged it and would not let it disperse until it had purged itself of Girondins reaction and the Jacobins had firmly taken in hand the guidance of the revolutionary state.

The Calcutta Congress presented a somewhat similar picture. The two wings of the congress could be roughly compared respectively with the Girondins and Jacobins, although most of the real Indian Girondins are outside the congress. Nevertheless, through the instrumentality of the right wing leaders of the congress they exercise a decisive influence upon its policy. So the conflict between the wings

of the congress, when it met in Calcutta at the end of 1928, can be compared roughly with the conflict inside the French National Convention in the beginning of 1793. In both cases, it was the struggle for the leadership of the revolution between two sections of the bourgeoisie—one anxious to brake the development of the revolution so that it did not go further than needed for the immediate interests of big landowning, financial, industrial and commercial classes, while the other advocating a more radical social-political transformation affecting a much larger sections of the population. In both cases, the latter in spite of its essentially bourgeois character, represented a political expression of the masses; for the realisation of the programme of bourgeois democratic revolution advocated by it, objectively contribute to the growth of the working class, and thereby to the ultimate establishment of socialism. In both cases, the radical elements were dissatisfied with the conservative outlook of the big bourgeoisie, and desired to snatch from them the leadership of the revolution. But as in France of the latter eighteenth century, so in India of the earlier twentieth century, the radical elements drew their inspiration from the working class, and have the latter's support in order to realise their political aspiration. The Great French revolution proceeded from victory to victory as long as it operated with mass energy. Jacobinism captured the leadership of the revolution with the support of the Parisian proletariat. It went down when its essentially bourgeois nature got better of its proletarian deviation.

The Calcutta demonstration can be compared with the July insurrection of Paris, because it was an offer of the proletariat to support the radical bourgeoisie in their fight for the leadership of the national revolution. Indeed, the radicalisation of the nationalist ranks, which culminated in the abortive conflict in the Calcutta Congress, was the political reflection of rapidly developing workingclass activity of the proletariat evidenced by the great strike of the last year. The weakness of the radical wing of the congress was in its inability to understand its own existence. In this, it differs from Jacobinism. It does not consciously operate with revolutionary forces; it is simply

driven by them, often reluctantly. Therefore it failed to grasp the mighty hand of fellowship extended to it by the proletariat in the critical moment, and consequently was outmanoeuvred by the reformist leaders acting inside the congress as the agents of Indian Girondism.

The failure, rather refusal, of the bourgeoisie to lead the national revolution caused the rise of radicalism; the inability of the latter to capture the leadership when it was there waiting to be captured by a bold hand, opens the way for the proletariat to appear on the scene independently— if the radical bourgeoisie cannot be driven to capture the leadership of the revolution, the proletariat must assume the leadership themselves, otherwise it will be used by its present owners, the bourgeoisie, to liquidate the revolution.

The petty bourgeois radicals do not understand the gravity of the situation; or they do understand it but are afraid to force it. Whatever it might be, there is no mistake on the part of those whose position is threatened by the recent events. Commenting upon the Calcutta Congress the clever bourgeois ideologist Bipin Pal wrote:

“It can no longer be said that the educated classes have no backing from the people... Indeed, it is doubtful whether the lead at all comes from the educated classes, or whether these leaders are no more or less helpless instruments in the hand of the awakened multitudes... The Leviathan has commenced to move. This was demonstrated by the invasion of the congress by twenty thousand labourers... The time cannot be very far when the working class, once aroused to the sense of their power to coerce the government, will refuse to be exploited by the middle class politicians; ‘Red’ leaders will rise from among them who will have no respect for any law or order, either economic, political or moral.”

Himself an ex-radical, indeed, the father of Indian political radicalism, Pal exposes the hollowness of the present left opposition. The latter’s bankruptcy fully warrants the remarks he makes.

He writes:

“Neither the Congress, nor Mosleague, nor Khilafat leaders and much less the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha will

bring about a revolution. None of them is made of the stuff that creates revolutions. Yet all these people have been working for revolution."

This is a very true characterisation of the situation. People with no sympathy for revolution are "Working for revolution". This proves that already the working class dominates the political life of the country.

Testimony to similar effect comes from other sources. For example, the rapidly growing hatred against the communists and the legislation for their suppression are due to the recognition of the tendencies in the political life of the country. The basic purpose of the Trade Disputes act is to suppress the political activity of the working class. In his speech opening the new year session of the legislative assembly the viceroy made it clear that imperialism recognises its most dangerous enemy in the proletariat. Commenting upon the speech the official organ of imperialism, the *London Times* (29 January) made clear what the viceroy had in his mind. The journal writes:

"There is no real connection between these two unrests, (labour and congress opposition). But their very existence and their co-existence, explains and fully justifies the attention which Lord Irwin gave to the labour problems."

Growing activity of the working class and radicalisation of the petty bourgeoisie are closely connected. The former produces the latter. Imperialism and the native bourgeoisie understand it, and go to the root of the problem in their efforts to meet the situation effectively. But petty bourgeois radicalism flounders like ship with broken rudder, because it has not the courage to develop into real Jacobinism by placing itself at the crest of the rising tide of revolutionary working class energy. The result is the necessity for the proletariat to assume the leadership of the national revolution betrayed by the big bourgeoisie and deserted by the petty bourgeois radicals.

The uprisings of Colombo and Bombay followed the Calcutta demonstration indicating the bold advance of the proletariat in that direction.

The Calcutta Congress, not so much its hollow "ultima-

tum" as the events that led up to it and the background of mass activity on which it met, alarmed imperialism and the native bourgeoisie. Cry against revolution, threat to law and order, and communist menace was heard from every direction. Taking advantage of this atmosphere of panic imperialism tried to and easily succeeded in terrorising petty bourgeois radicalism into a retreat. Referring to the Gandhi resolution, which the radicals had put on as glorious laurels, the *Englishmen* of Calcutta correctly observed: "In India sanction to enforce a national demand can mean only one thing—revolution." The *Statesman* demanded suppression of the congress as a "seditious body". In the face of this attack, petty bourgeois radicalism was totally unnerved, and shamelessly repudiated the accusation that it had ever wanted a revolution. The most representative organ of petty bourgeois radicalism, the *Forward* of Calcutta, wrote a series of articles, day after day, pleading innocence to the changes made by the imperialist organ. It wrote:

"On a careful analysis of the apparently innocent word 'sanction' our contemporary has discovered that it is dangerous verbal dynamite capable of blowing up all law and order to pieces... The news will, of course, come to every congressman as a surprise, for they are not aware that there has been any change in the congress creed, or that the congress has departed from its policy of non-violence." (8 January.)

"Violence has been rightly ruled out by the congress. The country has to devise an efficacious remedy on lines which may not bring it into conflict with the so-called laws of the country. That is the economic boycott. (9 January.)

"When congressmen talked of 'sanction', they could not mean anything more serious than pressure of public opinion, economic boycott or non-payment of taxes. Our contemporary had to admit that none of these suggested methods of enforcing admission from the British government should carry the implication of violence." (10 January.)

So petty bourgeois radicalism successfully pleaded not guilty at the bar of imperialist law, thereby exposing itself as completely unworthy to develop into Jacobinism basing

itself consciously on the militant action of the revolutionary proletariat.

Judged in the light of this contemptible debacle or petty bourgeois radicalism, the uprisings of Colombo and Bombay shine as glorious landmarks in the history of Indian revolution. The show that the proletariat is the only class that can really fight imperialism; that is not afraid; that can really sacrifice, while the others talk hypocritically; and that possess potential powers which, when fully mobilised will be able to meet and overcome the most powerful enemy.

History has bestowed upon the Indian proletariat the role to hold high the standard of national revolution.