

XXIII. THE CONFERENCE OF THE WORKERS AND PEASANTS PARTY OF INDIA

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The revolutionary elements in the Indian nationalist movement are organising themselves. They have not yet found a unified leadership. But consciously or unconsciously, they all look for it in the right direction—to the proletariat. The speeches made and resolutions adopted at a number of subsidiary conferences, that took place simultaneously with the annual meeting of the National Congress, show to what an extent the conditions are ripe for the proletariat to exercise hegemony in the struggle for national freedom.

Only a few years ago socialism was practically unknown in India. Indeed, the attitude even of the radical petty bourgeoisie towards socialism was one of suspicion and hostility. The nationalist petty bourgeoisie were decidedly reactionary in social outlook. Rude realities of the present, and hope for a brighter future are liberating the petty bourgeoisie from the illusions about the dead past. Breaking away from feudal traditions, they find little solace in capitalism, which under the conditions of colonial exploitation does not offer their class any prospect of substantial economic betterment. They must gather courage to look further into the future. And there the beacon of socialism attracts their vision showing them the only way out of political suppression, economic ruin and cultural stagnation. As a result to this, the most characteristic feature of the political situation in India today is the rapidly growing popularity of socialism. All the petty bourgeois subsidiary organisations of the National Congress profess socialism.

It is significant that the profession of socialism by the petty bourgeois radicals coincides with their revolt against the policy of compromise with imperialism. This shows once again the inability of the petty bourgeoisie to play an independent political role. As soon as they attempt to break away from the leadership of the big bourgeoisie, they, in spite of themselves, tend to come under the influence of the

proletariat. They do so in spite of themselves, for the petty bourgeoisie by themselves are not a socialist class. And, as they do so in spite of themselves, they are not likely to advance in the revolutionary direction unless the proletariat meet them half way and make a fighting alliance with them for the realisation of the programme of national revolution, for betraying which they are revolting against the leadership of the big bourgeoisie. Their profession of socialism should be taken as indication of the opportunity to bring them under the revolutionary leadership of the proletariat. In the revolutionary struggle for national democratic freedom under the hegemony of the proletariat, some of them are likely to be entirely de-classed and become consciously socialist. On the other hand, there is the danger of their relapsing under the control of the big bourgeoisie or developing into a Socialist Democratic Party, if their objective (unconscious) advance towards the proletariat is not met promptly and tactfully.

The other danger of petty bourgeois radicalism crystallising into a reformist Social Democratic Party, has been revealed by the views expressed by some leaders of the movement on such vital question as the function of the state, means of capturing political power, relation of classes, confiscation of land, etc.

A picture of the situation gives a very clear perspective of future development, and shows our tasks. It is a tug-of-war for the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle. Which way should it develop—towards constitutional agitation under the bourgeois leadership, or revolutionary fight under the hegemony of the proletariat? The petty bourgeoisie, which constitute the great bulk of the conscious and active nationalist ranks, stand in the middle, willing to move towards revolution, but lacking a determined, clear-sighted, unified leadership. And as this can alone come from the proletariat, the task before us is clearly defined.

During the meeting of the National Congress the following subsidiary bodies held their separate conferences: 1. All-India Youths League; 2. Swadhin Bharat Sangha (orga-

nisation of those who suffered persecution for revolutionary activity); 3. Socialist Youth League; and 4. All-India Volunteers Corps. The members of these bodies represent the most active element and majority of the Congress rank and file. Socially, they are all petty bourgeois intellectuals who are, as a rule, in very precarious economic condition. The Independence League, recently formed by the left wing leaders of the Congress, is at present the political leader of this revolutionary nationalist mass. The League also held its meetings during the sessions of the Congress. But being an integral part of the Congress, it did not assert separate existence. Consequently, radical and revolutionary forces, that constituted the majority in all the congresses and conferences (except the All-parties Convention) were without a unified political leadership. The Congress, and incidentally its clearly revolutionary subsidiary organisations, were dominated by the bourgeoisie standing outside it. The following quotations from the speeches made and resolutions passed in the subsidiary conferences show that the outcome of the Congress does not represent the realities of the situation, which is decidedly revolutionary.

In a statement made in the All-parties Convention in opposition to the dominion constitution the spokesman of the Swadhin Bharat Sangha said:

“Dominion status means that the entire politics of India will in the last resort be controlled by Britain in the interest of British imperialism. . . We are also of the opinion that the salvation of India and her masses lies in the establishment of socialist regime. We are afraid that the constitution sketched in the Nehru report is based on capitalist construction of society. We are not prepared to accept this constitution.”

In contrast to the compromise in the National Congress on the controversy over independence versus dominion status, the Youths' conference resolved that

“Complete independence and not dominion status should be the immediate objective of India.”

The conference called upon the youths to attain this goal by “all possible means”. This is an improvement upon the

independence resolution passed by the Congress in 1927, in which such restrictions were placed upon the means for the attainment of independence as reduced the whole resolution to empty verbiage.

By the second resolution the conference enjoined the youths to "combat capitalism by all available means". Capitalism was condemned as "detrimental to the best interest of the nation".

A third resolution indicated revolt against the cult of reactionary pacifism. This meant repudiation of Gandhi—the idol of petty bourgeois nationalism. This resolution calls upon:

"Young India to take up the new challenge of imperialism and to create in the country an atmosphere in which responsive violence should not be deprecated."

This resolution has direct bearing on the situation. A few days before the meeting of the National Congress a British police officer was killed at Lahore. The assassination was generally interpreted as an act of the nationalists avenging the death of Lajpat Rai of injuries inflicted by the police during a demonstration. All the nationalist leaders, including those of the Congress, rushed to denounce vehemently the perpetrators of the deed, as they had done on previous occasions. This treacherous and cowardly behaviour of the bourgeois leaders was always resented by the rank and file. Now it is openly condemned. The nationalist rank and file declare their determination to answer imperialist violence by revolutionary violence.

The Socialist Youths' conference met with the slogan, "We want Revolution, and not Reformation". We find the following statements in the speech opening the conference:

"Nationalism is the slogan of the middle class, while socialism is the cry of the toiling masses. The present social evils can be cured not by reform, but by revolution.

"Dominion status was the cry of vested interest, and it remains to be seen how far the extremist section of the capitalist class will become revolutionary in politics."

Thousands of young men went about in military uniform as nationalist volunteers, signifying what such demonstration can only signify, that is, an enthusiastic will on their part for a real fight for freedom. When this is compared with the previous uniform of loin-cloth and Gandhi-cap of homespun stuff, the implication of the development of the movement becomes evident.

The climax of the situation was a huge mass demonstration in which over twenty-thousand workers participated. Previously thousands of workers, particularly peasants, used to be herded into the meetings of the Congress to be lectured by the bourgeois leaders. They had nothing to say or do; but only to provide an imposing background for the reformist policy of bourgeois nationalism. They are no longer satisfied with the passive role. This year the demonstration was a part of the general revolt against bourgeois leadership, and it was the most important—the dominating factor in the revolt. The demonstration indicates the readiness of the proletariat to appear on the political scene as an independent force, which is the essential condition for its ability to be the new leader in the new stage of the revolution.

Meeting in this atmosphere of revolutionary development from all sides, the Workers and Peasants Party, whose driving force are the communists, was objectively the most important event of the moment. The Workers and Peasants Party is not the Communist Party, although the communists play in it the leading and dominating role. Several years ago it appeared on the scene as the first sign of radicalisation of the nationalist masses. As such the communists supported it, and aided its growth. Practically all the great strikes of the last two years were led under the banner of the Workers and Peasants Party. The object of the communists was to make this new party the rallying ground for all the nationalist revolutionary elements, to develop it into a revolutionary nationalist mass party which is a crying need of the moment.

The quickening of the process of radicalisation inside the nationalist rank during the last year placed the Workers

and Peasants Party in a very favourable position. Until now the party functioned in loose, decentralised manner, as practically independent provincial organisations. It was divided to reorganise the party on a national scale in a conference which should meet simultaneously with the National Congress at the same place.

The conference of the Workers and Peasants Party was very well attended. It magnificently reflected the revolutionary atmosphere prevailing in the country. But in doing so, it forgot, or rather neglected, its objective task—to mobilise all the forces of national revolution under its banner. Instead of coming out as the leader of the entire revolt, it placed itself in the position of one factor—indeed, the most advanced and most courageous factor—of the revolt.

In the main political resolution of the conference not only the Nehru report is rightly condemned as “a bourgeois democratic scheme of a not very advanced type”, but an attitude of hostile criticism is also taken towards the Independence League representing the opposition to the bourgeois right wing of the Congress. Indeed, no distinction is made between the two factions inside the Congress. When the petty bourgeois left radicals are trying to oust the bourgeois leaders from the leadership of the nationalist movement, they are not supported; on the contrary, they also were condemned as the enemies of the workers and peasants, in the same breath with the representatives of big capital and landlordism. The criticism levelled against the programme of the Independence League was essentially correct; but the well-merited criticism should have been accompanied by a positive attitude—an offer of united front on the common platform of anti-imperialist struggle. The relation with the rest of the nationalist movement is defined as follows:

“While the Workers and Peasants Party remains relatively weak and unorganised in the country, it will be necessary to follow the traditional policy of forming fractions within Congress organisations for the purpose of agitation, of exposing the reactionary leadership and

of drawing revolutionary sections towards the WPP. This policy, however, is only temporary. The WPP can have no intention of dominating or capturing the Congress. The function of its members within the Congress is purely critical. Our party members, therefore, cannot be allowed to take office in the Congress organisations.”

A motion that the members of the party should join the Independence League with the purpose of capturing it was also rejected.

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