

The Indian National Congress in Power

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New Times (Moscow), No. 3, January 12, 1949

The 55th session of the Indian National Congress held at the end of December last was the first to be convened since the formation of the Indian Union as a result of the partition of India. Congress officially came to power on August 15, 1947, but actually its leaders had had a hand in the administration of the country since August 1946, when thanks to the efforts of the British an Indian Provisional Government was set up.

Before it took over the reins of government Congress claimed to represent the interests of all the peoples and classes of India except the princess and the landlords. The Congress leaders asserted that they were fighting for India's full independence and the elimination of feudal survivals. They promised to abolish the small feudal principalities and to reconstruct the big principalities on democratic lines, to redeem the land from the landowners and turn it over to the peasants, to nationalize the key industries and destroy the economic foundations of British rule in India, and to deliver the Indian working masses from poverty and starvation.

This program ensured Congress wide support among the Indian population and an absolute majority in the Constituent Assembly of the Indian Union. But the actions of Congress since it came to power indicate that it has no intention of carrying out its program.

Already in December 1946 the Congress leaders agreed that only 50 per cent of the representatives from the princes' States to the Indian Constituent Assembly should be elected by their legislative bodies, and that the remaining 50 per cent should be appointed by the princes themselves. Jawaharlal Nehru declared in the Constituent Assembly that monarchical rule in the States was fully compatible with a republican form of government in the Indian Union generally.

When it agreed in June 1947 to the partition of India into two dominions, Congress repudiated its former program of putting an end to the division of India into provinces and States. Such administrative reforms as have been carried out -- the enlargement of the States, for instance -- far from weakening the position of the princes, have only strengthened it. Rather than encourage the development of the popular democratic movement in the States, the Indian government has come out in opposition to it. When Indian troops occupied the State of Hyderabad in September 1948, they began to

repress the peasants of Telengana who had risen in revolt against the tyranny of the Nizam and the feudal landlords.

This shows that it was not in order to deliver the inhabitants of Hyderabad from the tyranny of the Nizam and his guards, the Razakars, that that State was occupied by Indian forces. The action of the Congress leaders was governed by the fear that the Telengana revolt and the peasant unrest in other parts of the State might influence the peasants in neighbouring provinces of the Indian Union. The Nizam continues to rule even after the occupation of Hyderabad.

In a word, with regard to the States, Congress in pursuing the same policy as that pursued by the British imperialists. This continuity of policy was openly proclaimed in November 1948 by Dr. Ambedkar, the Minister of Justice, in the Constituent Assembly. Objecting to the establishment of equal status for the provinces and the States, he said that the special commissions working on the problem of relations between the Indian Union and the States had bound themselves by definite pledges both to the Chamber of Princes and to individual rulers, and that therefore the Constituent Assembly must also consider itself bound by these pledges. It became obvious that, the Indian big bourgeoisie, in face of the growing popular movement, had formed a compact with the most reactionary elements in India, the princes, and had no intention of abolishing their power.

The Congress leaders have likewise renounced the national policy they formerly proclaimed. Beginning with 1920, Congress had demanded a change in the existing administrative division of the country, quite correctly characterizing it as medieval and bureaucratic. Congress insisted upon the formation of autonomous provinces coinciding with the territorial distribution of the various nationalities of India. Now the Congress leaders declare that to reconstruct the administrative division of India would be untimely. Those who demand the implementation of the old national program are branded as separatists. In the draft constitution there is not even a hint of the formation of linguistic provinces. It proposes to vest the President and the central government of the Indian Union with such broad powers that nothing would remain of provincial autonomy. Nor is there national equality in the Indian Union. Hindi has been proclaimed the official language, but in practice English is the language mostly used by the authorities.

All this confirms the opinion of the democratic press that although the Congress leaders claim to represent all the peoples of India, actually they voice the interests only of the big bourgeoisie, chiefly of the Gujarati and Marwari. These, having made a deal with British imperialism and bowed to the bankers of Wall Street, have no desire to share the market with the weaker bourgeoisie of the other Indian nationalities. Furthermore, the formation of national provinces would necessarily

imply the abolition of the feudal States. In the provinces where the big bourgeoisie is weak, the predominant role in the local organs of government would be played by elements more democratic than in the centre. But this would not be to the interest of the Indian big bourgeoisie. That is why the Congress leaders have gone back on their former program.

India is at present in the throes of an industrial decline. Output is falling in practically every branch. Steel output, which dropped to 1,200,000 tons after the war, continues to decline, and in 1948, according to some estimates, amounted to only 850,000 tons. Iron output is similarly declining. Production of cotton and jute textiles is also lower than in the war period. The British and American capitalists, upon whose help the Indian government relies, are anything but interested in promoting India's industrial development; on the contrary, they are anxious to retard it and to use the country as a market for their own commodities. Manufactured goods are shipped to India from U.S.A. and Great Britain. So long as India is economically dependent on imperialist powers, her industry will develop only to the extent that the latter find convenient for themselves.

The conditions for India's economic independence could be created only if her big industries were nationalized. The Congress leaders realized this full well and used to say as much before they came to power. But the key industries cannot be nationalized without affecting the interests of Tata, Birla, Dalmia and the other big Indian Industrial magnates, upon whom the Congress leaders are dependent. It is therefore not surprising that the government has postponed the question of nationalizing the major industries for ten years. This also applies to the industries belonging to British companies.

The Indian big bourgeoisie are too closely interconnected with British capital to permit the nationalization of its plants. Since the war a large number of joint Indian and British companies have been formed. Moreover, of late American capital has begun to penetrate into many Indian firms.

The Congress leaders have adopted a similar line with regard to agrarian reform. True, agrarian reform is still being ventilated in a number of provinces. Bills are being drafted which would slightly curtail the rights of the big landowners, although in return for very substantial compensation. But even if these bills were passed, landlordism and feudalism would still continue to hold sway in the countryside, and the peasantry would continue to live in semi-starvation. However, even the most skimpy projects of reform encounter the determined resistance of the Indian landlords, with whom the government has no desire to quarrel.

Yet without the abolition of landlordism, usury and other feudal features, there can be no progress in India's agriculture, which is a state of deep decline. In 1949, according to preliminary estimates, there will be a grain shortage of three million tons. South India is menaced with famine. The government is reintroducing rationing, which was abolished nine months ago. In February of this year, the supplies of some seventy million persons will be rationed, and the bread ration, it is stated, will range from 113 grams to a maximum of 170 grams per day. Regression in industry and agriculture is resulting in a decline of national income: from 67 rupees per capita in 1939-40, it fell to 62 rupees in 1947-48.

In none of the provinces so far has even the most meagre land reform been introduced. Where the peasant movement has attained particularly wide dimensions, in South India for instance, and in the Congress provinces of Andhra and Kerala, the local organizations of the National Congress openly side with the princess and landlords. The Congress governments of Travancore and Cochin States resort to measures of repression against the peasant and labour movements as brutal as those which were employed in the past by the ministers of the British Viceroy.

A reign of terror is being practised against the workers' and peasants' movement all over India. The Communist Party has been outlawed in a number of provinces. Its publications in the languages of the respective provinces have been banned practically everywhere. Distribution of the **People's Age**, central organ of the Indian Communist Party, has been prohibited in many areas. Congress has split the trade union movement by setting up a rival organization, the Indian National Trade Union Congress, which has the patronage of Sardar Patel, Vice-Premier and Minister for Home Affairs. But in spite of this scab organization, there is no sign of the strike movement in India waning. In the first quarter of 1948 there were 1,811 strikes, involving 1,840,780 persons -- the result of the rising cost of living and wholesale discharges of workers. Thousands of labour and trade union militants have flung into jail. The democratic youth organizations and peasant unions are likewise persecuted.

Such is the internal state of India. Even the Congress press has to admit that it is not encouraging. The Bengal **Amrita Bazar Patrika** wrote in its New Year review that the past year was one of tragedy, unrealized dreams and unfulfilled hopes, a year of fruitless effort for peace and well-being.

The **Free Press Journal**, organ of the Indian Socialists, lamented on the eve of the New Year that the year of "independence" had been one of blood and tears shed in vain, of divided efforts and fruitless hard toil.

The formal proclamation of dominion status for India has not altered the fact that the key economic positions remain in British hands. As to the joint Anglo-Indian

companies, they are completely dependent on British capital. A tendency is of late to be observed for British capital to strengthen its position in India, which was rather weakened during World War II. At the same time, American capital is extending and strengthening its hold, penetrating into Indian industry and especially trade.

British and American imperialism is taking advantage of India's economic dependence to exert direct political pressure on the Indian government and to interfere in the country's internal affairs. U.S. Ambassador Henderson stated at a press conference in Delhi on December 22, 1948, that America's "aid" to India would be directly dependent upon her future constitution and economic policy.

In foreign policy, India is being progressively drawn into the orbit of the Anglo-American bloc. The British and Indian press states that at the conference of Premiers of the British Dominions held last October, the Indian delegation pledged itself to get the Constituent Assembly to decide in favour of India's remaining within the British Empire. British Labourites and Indian Congressites are busy elaborating a suitable legal formula. But however smart that formula may be, and whatever new name may be given to the British Empire and its Indian Dominion, the fact is that India remains politically dependent on Great Britain. The imperial conference fully confirmed this. Even the official communique, which was deliberately couched in vague terms and was filled with talk of universal peace and a union of East and West, states that it was agreed that other (i.e., non-European) countries of the British Empire should be kept informed of the co-operation among the countries of Western Europe (in other words, the Western bloc). Comments in the British press were much more definite on this point. The **Daily Mirror**, for instance, wrote:

"Now India and Pakistan have made it plain that in economic matters and for defence they have thrown in their lot with the British Empire, the United States and Western Europe."

The Conservative London **Observer** stated on October 17 that Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan had rendered effective assistance to the British authorities in the fight against the national-liberation movement in Malaya.

The reactionary home policy of Congress is thus in complete line with its foreign policy. Congress-led India is being more and more drawn into the war machinations of the Anglo-American bloc.

Such was the record the Indian National Congress had to show at the opening of its 55th session on December 16, 1948, which was to endorse the reactionary political line of the Congress leadership.

For the first time in its history, Congress met on the territory of Jaipur State, in the vicinity of its capital. The Maharaja of Jaipur paid signal honours to the delegates. He placed his court guard at the disposal of the Congress Chairman, Pattabhi Sitaramaya. The chairman was driven in a silver-encrusted chariot drawn by white oxen.

Before the session opened, the Congress executive, the All-India Congress Committee, met to endorse the resolutions drafted by the working Committee. But voices of criticism of the activity of Congress were heard even in the executive. One member, Choitram Gidwani, declared that the Indian National Congress was not acting up to its resolutions, that the misfortunes of the population were due to bad government, and that the hardships and sufferings of the peoples of India were increasing and not diminishing. Congress leaders, he asserted, were solely out for power and personal profit.

The Chairman, Pattabhi Sitaramaya, interrupted Gidwani and did not allow him to continue. But this attempt to gag criticism did not produce the desired results. Dissatisfaction with Congress policy and its ruling clique continued to find vent in the speeches of delegates.

Very sharp attacks were levelled at the resolution which advocated that India should remain within the British Empire. Several members of the Committee spoke against it and demanded that India should leave the Empire. Jhanjhar and Mahavir Singh insisted that India pursue a policy of neutrality and steer clear of all blocs. Committee member Harwani demanded that the Indian Union be converted into a socialist republic. Another member, Nathulal, criticized the foreign policy of the Congress leaders and urged the establishment of sincere relations of friendship with the Soviet Union. This was a policy in which India and her people were vitally interested, he insisted.

These critical utterances of a number of members of the All-India Congress Committee reflected the discontent of the Congress rank and file with the policy of its leaders. But the voice of these representatives was raised in vain. Every important amendment to the resolutions was rejected.

At the session itself, practically no criticism was permitted. All the resolutions submitted by the Working Committee were carried, including the one to retain "special" relations with the British Empire, which essentially means perpetuating the dependent status of India as a component part of the British Empire.

In the resolution outlining the Congress' economic program, not a word was said about land reform. On the subject of nationalization, the resolution stated that the government had declared that its program was to create joint (government and private)

industries, that the greater part of the contemplated new construction would be private, and that although Congress policy provided for the gradual establishment of government control of the key industries and their transfer to the state, it was nevertheless not the intention of Congress to encroach on the lawful interests of the owners.

At one of the last sittings, eleven resolutions were passed practically without debate.

The session at Jaipur showed that the Indian National Congress has become the party of a reactionary bloc of Indian capitalists, landlords and princes. There are still quite a number of democratically minded persons among the Congress rank and file who believe that it is capable of fighting for the independence of the country and the freedom and welfare of the people. But these illusions are evaporating. The Congress leadership, as its home and foreign policy indicate, is not anxious to fight for India's genuine independence. It has entered into a compact with British and American imperialists and internal reaction to fight its own people.

The struggle for India's genuine independence, for the democratization of its political system and for the interests of its labouring masses is now going on outside Congress and against Congress. It is being waged by the democratic forces of the Indian people, the toilers of town and countryside, under the leadership of the working class. In spite of the police terror exercised by the ruling clique, the Indian people are courageously upholding their right to a free and independent existence on a footing of equality and fellowship with other nations of the world.