

THE

Workers' and Peasants' Party

OF BENGAL.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

BHATPARA 1928.

A. Call to Action

CENTRAL OFFICE:

2-1, EUROPEAN ALYUM LANE,

CALCUTTA.

Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF ANNUAL CONFERENCE

In order to bring its views, aims and methods before the public better than can be done by newspaper reports, the Workers' and Peasants' Party has decided to publish this short account of its preliminary recent Annual Conference. The Conference was held at Bhatpara on March 31 and April 1; which the President, Atul Chandra Gupta, M.A., B.L. in the Chair. The subject most discussed was organisation of the Party, but an effort was made to state the political position of the Party more definitely and to outline more clearly its policy and tactics in regard to various special questions. Thus in addition to the Executive Committee's resolution on the Political Situation, there were passed detailed resolutions on the Trade Union Movement, Youth, and the Peasantry.

The Political Resolution attempts a systematic account of the position of India at the present day, in regard both to its relations with the outer world, and to its internal affairs. The disturbed condition of the world under the reign of universal imperialism and the probability of war, especially between Britain and Russia, in the near future, are pointed out. The decline in the political and economic power of Britain forces the British imperialists to cling ever more tightly to India and to exploit her more intensely. The idea of India's attaining a tolerable position by agreement with Britain is ridiculous. Nevertheless Britain in order to maintain her power in India must come to a compromise with larger sections of the Indian upper classes, including now a large part of the industrial capitalists, hitherto the leaders of the nationalist movement and the congress. The capitalist representatives of the nation have almost ceased to fight, except in their own interest. They are not in favour of complete independence, nor democratic forms of government, nor the increased well-being of the people. The result has been that the Congress movement almost collapsed. It is only now rising again, with a new outlook and different aims.

A survey of the different sections of Indian society reveals a number of class conflicts which divide the nation more and more into two camps. The working class, the peasants, and a large part of the middle class are slowly beginning to revolt against the capitalist class, the landlords, the State rulers, the bureaucracy and the Government. The former fight for national freedom, the latter oppose. The two great movements, for national independence and for the economic emancipation of the masses, are becoming one.

In the light of this analysis, current events are surveyed. Thus, on the Statutory Commission and its landing in India, the resolution says:

“The collapse of the Non-operation movement was not at first realised, and expectation of its resumption and triumph continued for some time. But years went by, the policy of the Council Parties became more and more compromising, and no effort was made to revive a mass movement. Hope of progress along the old lines gradually faded, and at the same time the class conflict within the country and the Congress made itself increasingly felt. At first the reaction on the part of Congress supporters was growing indifference, but later it developed into a vague but increasingly acute discontent. The lower strata of the petty bourgeoisie who had been drawn into the Non-co-operation movement were becoming impatient for a forward move. This tendency has been assisted by various factors—prolonged economic stagnation, the growth of a war-atmosphere (preparations on the frontiers, failure to disarm, despatch of troops to China, etc.), disappointment at the complete failure of the British Labour Government to do what had been expected of a party pledged to self-determination and a fight against Imperialism, the Chinese and Japanese events, continued provocation by Imperialism (the Exchange question, the Bengal detentions and other repressive measures), Saklatvala's propaganda, Miss Mayo's book and its alleged official patronage, all have had their effect. A new policy is being sought, and a national feeling is once again arising, with a partial abandonment of the old ideas. The rise in various provinces of an organised Youth Movement after the absorption of the previous generation of the organised Youth in Congress agitation and subsequent stagnation, is symptomatic of the process. The increasing organisation and militancy of the workers, as shown in numerous recent strikes, adds to the volume of protest against the existing order.

On the other hand the bourgeoisie, with their supporters among the professional and other middle classes, were moving in the opposite direction. The long awaited Statutory Commission having its expected effect upon them, and draft constitutions, all contemplating Dominion Status as the goal of nationalist effort, were being prepared for acceptance by the Congress. (“Dominion Status” has for some time been the accepted aim of most schools of bourgeois nationalist thought. The essence of the idea is the maintenance of imperialist exploitation, but with the Indian bourgeoisie in a more favourable position, and with the imperial forces ready to defend bourgeois interests as new).

The appointment of the Statutory Commission without Indian members rendered a policy of conciliation by the bourgeois

leaders for a time impossible. So great was the general indignation that even the most compromising groups among the bourgeois nationalists have been forced to support the policy of Boycott, conditional or absolute.

The result has been to further exposure of the bourgeoisie, and to strengthen them temporarily as the national leaders. It has further hampered a serious campaign of mass opposition on the basis of the Boycott agitation. Nevertheless the public feeling has developed very strongly, inspite of all efforts to accentuate the communal divisions, so that the Congress and even the Liberal and others groups have had to go farther in the direction of mass opposition than they at first wished (the Independence Resolution and the agreement by the Benares meeting to an All-India hartal'. The masses too are entering the movement to a certain extent. (In Bombay three Unions took formal decisions to strike, and more than thirty thousand workers actually struck and demonstrated. Many workers took part in other places.)"

The conduct of the leaders of the Congress and the other Parties since the leading of the Commission has been far from satisfactory to many sections. Yet, out of fear of destroying "unity", adverse comment has been suppressed, and little or no criticism has appeared in the Press or elsewhere. We do not think that this state of things is healthy, or that "unity", based on abandonment of principle is desirable. Accordingly in discussing the All-Parties Conference, the resolution proceeds:

"Nevertheless the desertion of the majority of the bourgeois leaders, both within the Congress and without, is certain and is already taking place. They have partially abandoned the policy of abstention from the legislatures. Many, e.g. in the Assembly debate, openly appeal for Indian membership of the Commission, and admit the right of Imperialism to the last word in deciding the future of India. Boycott of principle was abandoned by the Assembly resolution which merely declared unacceptable the "present constitution and scheme of the Commission". The decision to draft a Constitution by the All-Parties' Conference is an admission of the right of the British Government to decide whether it shall be granted or not. Otherwise a statement of rights and a programme of action are all that are required of the All-Parties' Conference. The formula which it has accepted, "Full responsible government" and the apologetic plea that "Dominion status is a step towards Independence," mark the collapse of the Congress programme of complete independence. The quibbling over the communal differences show that no fundamental change in the nature of the government is sought, and the petty sectional interests of to-day

are allowed excessive importance. The decision, not to advocate the alteration of the despotic regime prevailing in the Indian States, means that the fight which the nationalist movement must carry on against feudal oppression is to be shirked. The almost unanimous opinion in favour of a second chamber based on some restricted franchise shows the reactionary and unrepresentative nature of the conference, and effectually disposes of the pretence that mass support is to be sought to enforce the demands. The almost entirely bourgeois composition of the conference determines its intentions and policy. The participation of the Trade Union Congress is of no significance, as it is rightly believed to be under bourgeois control. How seriously the inclusion of the Trade Union Congress is taken is shown by the decision not to admit the right of strike among the "rights of workers and peasants."

Nevertheless we agree that some Congress leaders are honestly mistaken in their compromise with the non-Congress Parties, and we appeal to them to give up their incorrect policy:

"Those Congress leaders who have agreed to the All-Parties Conference decisions have clearly shown that their advocacy of complete independence is insincere. The plea of Unity put forward to justify this action is entirely specious. Unity is possible only on the basis of a common principle. Those who want complete independence cannot compromise with those who are opposed to it. The sacrifice of complete independence for the sake of unity with the bourgeois parties is a betrayal of the immense majority of the population for the favour of a minute reactionary minority. Even the agreement of the bourgeois majority to many democratic principles, embodied in the All-Parties Conference decisions, is no adequate gain to weigh against the abandonment of the forward policy implied in the principle of the complete independence, and those who have agreed to this bargain are guilty of a serious tactical mistake, if no more."

The results of this policy are manifestly harmful, and the movement is being once more let down by the sterility and wrong policy of its leadership, due, not to lack of intelligence, but to its class interests. The masses must be aroused, but the bourgeoisie are afraid of arousing them. In the All-Parties Conference the proceedings have been notable only for their timidity and dullness. Outside, an equally painful absence of leadership has been shown:

"The agitation in the country of the Congress leaders, led by Bengal, is confined to the Boycott of British goods. This is a reformist weapon, intended to extort a compromise—alone it can do no more—from the Government. The bourgeois class is demonstrating once more its inability any longer to lead the national movement.

The middle classes, to whom the Boycott propaganda is directed, are reacting to it only in a half-hearted manner. Confidence in the majority of the bourgeois leaders has not been restored by their verbal radicalism over the Commission, and the masses generally are unwilling to be exploited for what they now know to be only the compromising ends of the bourgeoisie. There is a grave danger that the mass protest and indignation caused by the Commission will be allowed to die away in disappointment. Nothing but a militant and uncompromising practical lead will restore it to life and enable it to grow."

The Workers' and Peasants' Party claims to give that lead:

"The policy of the Party must be to carry forward the campaign for the boycott of the Commission to the utmost extent in spite of any sabotage. Strikes and hartal must be encouraged, and the masses brought into the movement by associating their demands with the national slogans. The campaign must demand *complete national independence*, and a *constituent assembly* elected by universal adult suffrage, which will decide finally the relation of India to the Empire and solve the pressing economic problems of the masses. No genuine leader of the people can but support such demands, which are clearly the minimum requirements of a nation demanding freedom.

The slogan of the Boycott of British goods may be supported as a means of arousing enthusiasm, but only as a subsidiary to the slogan of a Constituent Assembly. As opposed to the programme of the All-Parties Conference the Party must demand on behalf of the masses Complete Independence, and the establishment of democracy—Universal adult suffrage, freedom of speech etc., the abolition of the Native States and the landlord system, and the guarantee of the economic, political & social rights which the workers and peasants as classes require."

We contend that the call for a "Constituent Assembly" is the only practically useful lead which has been given since the Hartal was decided upon. The country is ready for this measure. The Commission, the Boycott and the Hartals have aroused the feeling of the public as it has not been aroused for years.

This feeling can be given expression through a really popular constituent assembly. The immense power of the masses, all their vaguely felt grievance and protest against the present system, can be concentrated and clarified by this means. If the mass campaign for complete independence which Mr. Srinivasa Iyengar and others propose, is devoted not to mere emotionalism, but to the practical work of rousing and organising the masses in preparation for a constituent assembly, to be called at some fixed and early date, than India will have made a big and valuable step forward,

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CONGRESS.

Our position in relation to the National Congress should be clear from what has been said above. Nevertheless, as many indulge in propoganda against us, saying that we are opposed to the Congress, a little more attention may be devoted to this point.

Our Manifesto to the Indian National Congress, Madras 1927, said:

"The programme of bourgeois nationalism (defence of the interests of the landowning and capitalist classes) has failed to stir the enthusiasm of the nation. The people must assert itself and move towards freedom in spite of the timidity of the bourgeoisie. The National Congress must be liberated from the influence of their spokesmen. Those willing to fight honestly and courageously for freedom must become the leaders of the people. The National Congress, if it wishes to conduct the struggle for national liberation must become the party of the people, representing not the fortunate few of the electorate, but the unfranchised majority. Council chambers present too restricted a field of operation for the party of the people, which must find much wider spheres of action."

Again in our Annual Report for 1927-28, it is remarked:

"On the other hand we must be careful not to oppose the National Congress without sufficient definition of our opinions, or we shall enable our opponents to claim that we are anti-Congress, or even anti-national, and that we stand merely for the sectional claims of labour. Recent developments in the policy of the Congress leaders, their action in connection with the Scavengers' strike (recruiting blacklegs) etc., show that there is a tendency to mobilise nationalist sentiment against us in a Fascist manner. It is unnecessary to say that this development may become an extremely dangerous one for us and for the movement. We must maintain our alliance with as large a stratum as possible of the middle class, and can ally with any section, whatever its social basis, which fights against imperialism. The basis of our opposition to the Swaraj Party is not that it is bourgeois, but that it is not whole-heartedly for national independence."

And finally, the political resolution passed at Bhatpara contains the following passage:

"We must endeavour to make the Congress adopt a programme of mass demands and to support them in its current propoganda. We and our sympathisers must become members of the provincial and All-Indian Congress Committees, and take active part in such work as leads towards the development of mass movement. We must support the Congress while it fights Imperialism, but must

not hesitate to criticise the compromising tendencies of Congress leaders however prominent. The alliance of the Party with the petty-bourgeois "left" of the Congress must be consolidated, on the basis of direct action for complete independence, against the compromising bourgeois leadership."

These passages should make it clear that we are not opposed to the Congress. Like a great many others, we are not satisfied with the present Congress policy, but, unlike many other, we know what is wrong with Congress policy and our object is to change it.

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT.

The resolution on this subject passed at our recent conference, begins:

"The Trade Union movement, which must in the future play a very important part in the political struggle of the country, it yet in a very backward condition. To remedy this is one of the most important tasks before the party, and demands a large part of its attention and energy.

The chief weaknesses of the movement are:—

(1) Insufficient organisation, resulting particularly in the lack of provision for the effective participation of the members in the work, and determination of policy.

(2) The tendency to restrict the organisation to narrow bounds, of locality, trade or craft, & its result in the prevalence of rival and overlapping unions.

(3) Absence of a militant policy; paying excessive attention to minor grievances, and neglecting the important questions, wages, etc.

(4) Fear of politics.

(5) Unbusiness-like methods, which reduce efficiency and open the door to corruption.

The Trade Union movement has not yet learnt to avoid the mistakes committed by older movements. In particular the British Trade union movement, universally taken as a model, illustrates the necessity of participation in politics, and the dangers of sectarianism and insularity on the part of unions.

The chief root of the faulty organisation and policy of the movement is its domination by leaders drawn from the middle classes, who may have little or no knowledge of Trade Unionism

or politics, and who in some cases act as conscious agents of capitalism. They have shaped the movement to their ends, and imbued it with their outlook."

Everybody knows that this is the state of things in the Trade Unions, which consequently, instead of being, as in China, a tremendous and active force fighting for national freedom, are held, quite rightly, in contempt by almost all politicians. We are setting ourselves to alter this state of things.

YOUTH.

The resolution on the Youth Movement passed by the Workers' and Peasants' Party Conference, contains the following account of the political future before the Youth of India. and the paths which they can follow :

"The Youth is the only section of society able to free itself from the obsolete ideas of the older nationalist movement, and it is therefore upon the youth that the responsibility rests of forming and educating the new mass nationalist movement. The efforts of the old bourgeois school to retain its control over the Congress, the Trade Union movement, etc., can only be defeated by the new, more vigorous ideas developed by the youth.

In the conflict now developing in India, there are only two sides. Increasingly the upper classes, including a large section of the bourgeoisie, fight on the side of Imperialism against the rising mass movement. Any effort to find a middle course must necessarily fail. All experience of movements based on the middle classes proved that they must take sides, either with the bourgeoisie or with the working class. Fascism, a movement mainly of the middle classes, always and everywhere serves the interest of capitalism. Indian Fascism can only serve the cause of Imperialism, since Imperialism and Indian capitalism are in ever closer alliance. By striking at the working class organisations, Fascism would destroy the only force which can free India from Imperialism.

The rising generation is faced with two lines of action. It may pursue the path of traditional "pure" nationalism, which will inevitably lead to the defence of capitalism, and hence of Imperialism and of political and social reaction. Or it may take the side of the historically progressive mass movement, assist it in its difficulties, and advance the cause of national independence, democracy, and economic and cultural progress.

The youth of all India is now awakening to consciousness on a great scale. It is essential that the Workers' and Peasants'

Party should attract to its banner the newly organising forces of the youth. It must take energetic measures to draw as large a proportion as possible to the side of the masses, and to give them its scientific social outlook and energetic radical policy."

We ask all intelligent persons to consider the account given above of our aims and policy, and to decide whether it is not scientifically sound, and the only policy capable of achieving what all desire to achieve—national independence, and relief from the poverty and oppression which keep nine-tenths of our population in misery.

CALCUTTA:

The 6th April, 1928.

Published for the *Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal* by Muzaffur Ahmad at the office of the Party, at 21/1 *European Asylum Lane, Calcutta* and printed by S. C. MAJUMDAR at the Sri Gouranga Press, 74/1, Mirzapur Street, Calcutta.
