

LEFT PARTIES IN INDIA

By AN INDIAN MARXIST

The emergence of military regimes in Burma and Pakistan is bound to have an impact with far-reaching effects on the political life of India, where bourgeois democracy in its classical form is sought to be "experimented as a challenge to world communism." The bourgeois politicians of the ruling Congress Party and their petty-bourgeois allies are indeed a bit panicky about the swift developments in the neighboring countries. But a bolder section among them has already begun a campaign against the so-called parliamentary system of democracy. Among the advocates of a "non-party system of government" in India is the erstwhile Socialist leader, Jaiprakash Narayan, now a convert to the Sarvodaya ("good of all") philosophy of (Saint) Acharya Vinoba Bhawe. Fresh from his tour of the Western "democracies" of Europe, he has begun to warn his "compatriots" that parliamentary democracy is not suited to the "genius of the Indian people." His new campaign is getting a big boost in the bourgeois press. A powerful group of Indian industrialists and financiers is known to be supporting his move.

If anything, the installation of army regimes in Burma and Pakistan is a clear indication that the ruling bourgeoisie of the "newly independent" Asian countries is prepared to discard the garb of parliamentary democracy if its existence is threatened by a revolutionary upheaval. It will not hesitate to resort to armed suppression of the growing discontent of the masses. If the transformation in the character of these bourgeois regimes has been "peaceful," it was due primarily to the utter weakness of the working-class movements in those countries. These developments establish that the bourgeoisie of the underdeveloped nations cannot resolve its own internal contradictions by normal "democratic" means. The bourgeoisie of even an "advanced" metropolitan nation like France, once hailed as a "cradle of capitalist democracy," had to resort to a dictatorial regime under de Gaulle to resolve its crisis, thanks to the shameless betrayal of the French proletariat by the Stalinist and Social-Democratic parties. The "newly independent" bourgeoisie of underdeveloped nations of Asia can be expected only to improve upon the de Gaullist technique to safeguard its tottering system by establishing a naked military regime without any democratic pretensions.

The Indian bourgeoisie is the most developed and politically stable among the bourgeoisies of Asian nations, with the exception of Japan. In the Indian National Congress it has a powerful political party with long anti-imperialist traditions. Nevertheless, the

Indian bourgeoisies also reflects all the basic characteristics of a backward and underdeveloped capitalist economy. If the working class of India and its political parties do not effectively intervene in the coming crisis of the Indian economy, there is nothing to prevent the Indian bourgeoisie, despite the democratic pretensions of its leaders, from following in the footsteps of its neighbors in Burma and Pakistan.

There are already indications that the right-wing leadership of the Congress (as opposed to the so-called "liberal" wing under Nehru) is moving in the direction of a more and more authoritarian regime. Open collaboration between the right-wing Congress and the army junta cannot be ruled out. A drift toward such a regime will have the tacit support of the US and British imperialists at the present juncture.

Even in Ceylon, an army coup was reportedly attempted (according to Premier Bandarnayake) by the former UNP premier, John Kottalawala. The attempt might be repeated, this time with the possible connivance of the "Socialist" Bandarnayake, who is equally anxious to "save the system" from a workers' revolution. If anything has prevented the Ceylonese ruling interests from already moving in the direction of a military coup, it is the powerful working-class movement led by the Trotskyist Sama Samaja Party. The "Banda" government cannot be relied upon to resist a coup. After all, did not the "socialist" leaders of the Burmese A F P L, U Nu and U Ba She, despite their recent bitter conflicts, succumb to the pressure from the army? In Ceylon, especially, there is a British naval base, still not evacuated, and the British imperialists would be only too willing to step into the fray.

The army coup in Burma and Pakistan has, however, a positive political aspect. It has exploded the myth of "peaceful transition to socialism" fondly fostered by the Stalinists (Amritsar Thesis of the CPI) and reformist Socialists in India and other Asian countries.

Indeed these developments are bound to have an impact with far-reaching consequences on the ranks of Stalinist parties in Asia. Revolutionary Marxists in India cannot afford to take a complacent view of these developments. The alternative before the exploited masses of Asia is either successful socialist revolution or a bourgeois military dictatorship after some years.

The masses' disillusionment with the Congress regime and their resultant discontent with the present capitalist social order are no doubt manifested in the increasing number of strikes of workers and salaried

employees, the struggles of the rural poor, students' agitations, demonstrations by refugees, democratic struggles of linguistic groups, etc. The capitalist regime is compelled to resort to ruthless suppression of these mass struggles because of its inability to meet the demands of the people. Nevertheless, these struggles — in the absence of a revolutionary leadership which can be provided only by a strong well-knit all-India Marxist-Leninist Party — remain generally at the level of local and often sporadic outbursts. Their weakness lies in the fact that these struggles of the exploited masses are not linked with the basic objective of the working class, namely, the overthrow of the capitalist regime and the establishment of a rule of workers and peasants to usher in a socialist order.

The reasons for this limited development of the mass movement are, among others, the reformist policy of the traditional left parties like the CPI, PSP, SP and the absence of a revolutionary Marxist leadership of the working class. Though the objective situation is favorable and the masses are advancing on the road of struggle, these struggles do not attain higher political levels and transform themselves into a titanic united mass struggle of all exploited sectors for the establishment of socialism.

There is, however, nothing like an absolutely hopeless situation even for an underdeveloped bourgeoisie. If the Indian proletariat fails in its historical mission as the leader of the Indian revolution, the bourgeoisie will not sit with folded hands and wait "peacefully" for its doom. Burma and Pakistan have shown the way for the Indian bourgeoisie. This is the greatest challenge the revolutionary left in India has to face today.

In the context of the rapidly changing conditions in Asia, let us evaluate the role of the various left parties which are functioning in India at present. These parties can be classified into four broad categories :

- 1) Petty-bourgeois reformist Socialist Parties like the PSP and the SP ;
- 2) the Stalinist CPI ;
- 3) revolutionary Marxist parties and groups ;
- 4) centrist groups orienting towards Marxism.

PETTY-BOURGEOIS SOCIALIST PARTIES

The Praja Socialist Party and the recently created Socialist Party of Dr Lohia can be considered as the legitimate representatives of the right and left wing of the reformist socialist movement in India. There is in fact no real economic base for Social Democracy in underdeveloped countries like India, in contrast to metropolitan capitalist countries where Social Democracy could grow as an ideology of the labor aristocracy and middle class, which could be provided with tolerable living standards by their respective bourgeoisies out of the super-profits derived from colonial exploitation. In some Asian countries like Burma, Ceylon, etc, the leaders of the middle-class Social

Democrats themselves have played the role of classical defenders of the weak capitalist classes of those countries. Reformist Socialist Parties with a predominantly petty-bourgeois social base have emerged and survived in India only as a by-product of the sectarian and opportunist political policies of the Stalinist CPI and due to the absence of a powerful Marxist proletarian party.

Neither the P S P nor the S P was an independent outgrowth of the working-class movement ; both had their origin in the Congress Socialist Party which was formed in the early thirties as a radical group inside the bourgeois Congress. The initial leaders of the group were radical nationalists who were disillusioned with the bourgeois Gandhian leadership; though they never completely broke with Gandhism, which sabotaged the anti-imperialist struggles. These elements did not orient to the CPI because they were repelled by that party's ultra-leftist, anti-national policies during the 1930-33 anti-imperialist movement.

The ideology of the C S P was a variety of confused middle-class socialism based on the conception of peaceful transition to socialism to be brought about by the Gandhian methodology of "non-violent" struggle. Its leadership was opposed to the Marxian conception of irreconcilable class struggle. The CSP functioned as a radical petty-bourgeois wing of the Congress, always vacillating between reactionary Gandhism and scientific socialism.

In the 1942 anti-imperialist struggle the CSP leaders found themselves at the head of the nation-wide upheaval mainly due to the treacherous role of the Stalinist CPI which opposed the movement. But instead of developing the movement in the direction of a revolutionary overthrow of imperialism through militant class struggles by the masses, the CSP leaders diverted the energies of those masses toward futile terrorist activities against imperialism.

After the "independence" deal in 1947, the CSP under the pressure of its ranks broke away from the Congress and renamed itself the Socialist Party. The basis of the "new" party was a reformist programme of achieving socialism by gradual and constitutional means, and rejection of Marxism. For a while the SP created the illusion that it could emerge as a major opposition to the capitalist Congress. The results of the first general elections in India, in 1952, however, shattered this illusion of the leadership.

The SP experienced periodical splits and dissensions under the impact of growing mass movements. A group of "left Socialists" broke away from the SP in 1951, protesting against the policies of the right-wing leadership, and later merged with the CPI. Following the 1952 election debacle, the SP leadership tried to consolidate its position by seeking a merger with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party, a group of dissident Congressmen, and eventually the present Praja Socialist Party was formed.

As a protest against this opportunist merger, the Marxist elements inside the SP split away and tried to consolidate themselves as an independent Marxist party.

A new split in the P S P and the formation of the Socialist Party by the dissidents under the leadership of Dr Lohia three years ago brought to the open once again the basic weakness of the reformist-socialist movement in India. Although seemingly more militant in its approach, the Lohiaite SP also lacks a clear ideological perspective and is torn between conflicting loyalties to bourgeois Gandhism and proletarian Marxism. In the brief period of its existence, an organizational and ideological crisis has already developed inside the Lohia Socialist Party.

The leaderships of both the P S P and the S P are opposed to the Marxian methodology of struggle. They do not recognize the essentially capitalist character of the present Indian state. Further they adulterate such forms of class struggle as strikes and demonstrations with such Gandhian politico-ethical methods as satyagraha, hunger strikes, etc. They utilize the extra-parliamentary struggles of workers and peasants, but only to subordinate them to the objective of the mere winning of electoral success. As the crisis of Indian capitalism deepens, and, as a result, spontaneous mass struggles sharpen, the ranks of these parties are no doubt moving more and more in the direction of authentic class struggles while the leadership is drifting into the camp of capitalist reaction. Further disintegration of these Socialist Parties, therefore, is inevitable.

Revolutionary Marxists should ruthlessly expose the vacillations of the middle-class leadership of these Socialist Parties while at the same time adopting a friendly and sympathetic attitude toward their militant ranks, who can be won over to Marxism by extensive campaigns of political and ideological explanation in the course of the day-to-day struggles of the working class and other toiling masses.

THE CPI AND STALINISM

The Communist Party of India as a political instrument of international Stalinism has been a major obstacle to be successful consummation of a socialist revolution in India. As a result of its Stalinist practices for the last three decades, the CPI has presented to the Indian masses a perverted and distorted picture of Marxism. In the domain of political practice, while subserving the diplomatic needs of the Soviet bureaucracy, it betrayed past national liberation struggles against imperialism and disrupted the working-class movement at crucial periods by sometimes opportunist, sometimes sectarian, policies. In the present phase it is pursuing a policy of supporting and defending weak Indian capitalism against the growing revolutionary struggles of the masses.

The history of the CPI reflects various zig-zags in

the foreign policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union since 1928. The initial nucleus of the party emerged in the twenties and got rooted in the working class on the basis of the militant strike actions of industrial workers which it led. These militants soon came under the influence of Stalinism, the ideology of the Soviet bureaucracy, which triumphed over the genuine Marxist-Leninist wing of the Bolshevik Party in the Soviet Union after the death of Lenin and usurped the leadership of the Communist International.

This resulted in the CPs of all countries being subordinated to the C P S U and being transformed into subservient instruments of the policies of the Soviet bureaucracy. Hence the CPI also, during its existence in the last three decades, evolved and pursued policies which were derived, not from the inner dialectics of the Indian situation and the standpoint of the needs of the national liberation struggle and, after independence, of the socialist revolution, but from the requirements of the foreign policy of the Soviet bureaucracy. The leadership of the CPI explained this unprincipled sequence of shifts in the different policies of the CPI by a system of sophisticated arguments, and in the name of the "strategy" of the world communist movement under changing historical conditions. The Soviet bureaucracy, for its part, impelled by its sectional "caste" interests and having as a result undergone a narrow nationalist degeneration, evolved the anti-Marxist theory of "socialism in a single country." The CPs of other countries were therefore logically assigned the limited and exclusive task of exerting pressure on their respective bourgeoisies to maintain friendly relations with the Soviet Union, rather than the fundamental task of socialist revolution in the capitalist countries. This alone can explain the visibly blatant and abrupt zig-zags of the CPI line.

Thus for example the CPI resorted to the ultra-left adventurist line of opposing the anti-imperialist movement launched by the Congress leadership in 1930-33. This was in pursuance of the international Stalinist strategy of opposing the national bourgeoisie of colonial countries following the collapse of the Stalin-Chiang alliance which had led to the butchery of the Chinese Revolution (1925-28). The correct line for the CPI was to participate in the anti-imperialist movement on the basis of an independent proletarian programme and methods of struggle and to isolate the compromising bourgeois Gandhian leadership from the masses. The sectarian mistake of the CPI during that period completely isolated the party from the militant anti-imperialist masses and discredited it as being an "anti-national" party.

After the triumph of Hitler in Germany, when Stalin began to woo the so called "democratic" capitalist powers in the name of building anti-fascist "people's fronts," the CPI started courting the Gandhian leadership. Overnight the CPI began to advocate a policy

of mass-entry into the Congress, which it now characterized as a "national front" of the Indian people, discarding its earlier characterization of the Congress as a capitalist party. Marxism was distorted by the CPI to suit the needs of the Indian bourgeoisie, led by the Congress, which resorted to pressure tactics by limiting mass actions against imperialism to winning concessions for itself, since it had always feared that any mass revolution against imperialism would threaten its existence as well.

When the war broke out in 1939 between the "democratic" and the "fascist" imperialists, the CPI at first denounced it as an imperialist war, since fascist Germany happened to be in alliance with the Soviet Union at that time. The CPI executed a veritable volte-face a few months after the Soviet Union was attacked by the Nazi forces. The Party characterized the essentially imperialist war as a "people's war" and it became the most ardent supporter of the war efforts of the British imperialists in India.

During the "Quit India" struggle launched by the Congress leadership, which demonstrated tremendous revolutionary possibilities, the CPI played the most treacherous role of an imperialist fifth column by wrecking workers' and peasants' struggles against imperialism.

In the post-war period the CPI followed a class-collaborationist line in relation to the Indian bourgeoisie in pursuance of the worldwide Stalinist strategy of appeasing world capitalism. The CPI supported not only the "independence deal" between the British imperialists and the Indian bourgeoisie but also acclaimed the shameful partition of India on communal lines as a vindication of its false theory of "national self-determination" for the Moslem minorities.

The Zhdanov thesis heralded the period of strained relationships between the Anglo-American imperialists and the Soviet Union and the resultant strategy of "cold war" sponsored by the Stalinist bureaucracy. The CPI line took an ultra-adventurist turn (Randive Thesis of 1948), of all-out "insurrectionary" war against the bourgeois state in India. This was the period when the working class and the peasant masses in India still suffered from the illusion that the newly independent state under the Congress would improve their living conditions and usher in a new social order. The CPI organized workers' strikes and peasant revolts (in Telangana, etc), "without reference," as S A Dange, the Indian Stalinist leader, confessed a few years later, "to the preparedness and mood of the masses." This line resulted in the discrediting of the CPI and its isolation from the toiling people. Dange himself admitted: "These mistakes on the trade-union front, coupled with the violent suppression by the Congress government, led to the disruption of our trade unions and a setback to the working class." (Dange's report to the AITUC, 1952).

Impelled by insane adventurist frenzy, the party called upon members and supporters to hurl themselves into violent clashes with the armed forces of the state, in jails and outside, which resulted in the decimation of a considerable section of party, trade-union, and kisan subha militants.

The bourgeois Congress exploited the confusion in the working-class movement created by the adventurist line of the CPI to disrupt the trade-union struggle and sponsor its own trade-union organization in the form of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). The adventurism of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), controlled by the CPI, encouraged other leftist groups in the country also to set up rival central trade-union organizations, such as the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) and the United Trade Union Congress (UTUC), resulting in the disorganization of the entire working-class movement.

Since 1952 the strategy of international Stalinism has again undergone a change. The Soviet bureaucracy has been trying to win the support of the national bourgeoisie of underdeveloped Afro-Asian countries like India, Indonesia, Egypt, etc, against the imperialist powers. After the Madurai Congress (1952), the CPI switched over to a policy of "critical support" to the national bourgeois government of Nehru and its Five-Year Plans. Today the party is pursuing a policy of extending almost unconditional support to the Nehru regime. It tries to justify the new line on the grounds that the present character of the Indian revolution is "anti-feudal and anti-imperialist" and that its task is merely that of "completing the bourgeois-democratic tasks." The CPI is opposed to the programme of a socialist revolution. In the international field the CPI extends its support to the deceptive theory of "peaceful coexistence" or "Panch Sheel" evolved by the Nehru Government in collaboration with the Stalinist leaders of the Soviet Union and China. Today it advocates a theory of class collaboration between the capitalist exploiters and the working class in India and is advancing the anti-Marxist slogan of "industrial peace" as a means of "strengthening the national economy," ignoring the fact that it is a capitalist economy. The CPI has called for support to the "patriotic capitalists of India," which in effect means a complete surrender to the Indian bourgeoisie.

In Kerala the CPI specifically plays the role of maintaining law and order on behalf of capitalism while creating a dangerous illusion in the minds of the people that their basic problems can be resolved within the matrix of the present capitalist constitution and capitalist social order. The CPI further deceives the masses by using its ineffective parliamentary opposition to the Congress government and the limited mass struggle that, under pressure, it leads outside, to hide its abject surrender to the Indian bourgeoisie.

At its recent Amritsar Congress, the CPI leadership

enacted the farce of adopting a "democratic" constitution for the party. The new CPI constitution, which, to appease the rank and file, makes non-essential modifications in the organizational structure of the party, changed only in form and not in its content, is not based on the Leninist principle of democratic centralism, but perpetuates the bureaucratic stranglehold over the party ranks.

Recent developments in the international Stalinist movement, especially since the XXth Congress of the CPSU and the major ideological rifts in the Communist Parties of the Western capitalist countries following the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian workers' revolution, have had their own repercussions inside the CPI. The Khrushchev "revelations" have shattered moral authority of the bureaucratic Stalinist leadership. There is a great deal of ideological ferment within the CPI, which might result in dissidents deserting the party in search of a real Marxist alternative.

Although the CPI is deliberately pursuing a reformist policy of constitutional opposition to the capitalist regime dictated by present Kremlin line of placating the Indian bourgeoisie, the CPI cannot on that account be characterized as a Social-Democratic party. The CPI leadership will change its line overnight if the Nehru regime goes over to the imperialist camp and as a result the Kremlin strategy changes. The bourgeois leadership of the Congress is fully aware of the advantages it derives from the present line of the CPI but (as indicated by Morarji Desai recently), the bourgeois leadership also knows that the CPI line is only a temporary tactic.

It is the task of the revolutionary Marxists to expose the deceitful tactics of the CPI leadership which, in the service of the Indian bourgeoisie, seek to undermine the revolutionary struggles of the masses, and patiently explain, to all honest elements inside the CPI misled by the present leadership, the fundamental difference between Stalinism and authentic Marxism. There is every possibility of a large section of these honest elements inside the CPI breaking from Stalinism and accepting authentic Marxism-Leninism-Trotskyism.

THE REVOLUTIONARY MARXISTS

The revolutionary Marxist movement in India has remained weak and unorganized for peculiar historical reasons. Some of these reasons are : the overwhelming strength of Stalinism and the Stalinist CPI clothed in the aura of the October Revolution ; the cultural backwardness of the working class ; the pressure of the inherited feudal institutions of castes, etc on the people, retarding the growth of class consciousness ; the strangulating grip of the obscurantist feudal religious ideology over the masses in the absence of even a bourgeois rationalist outlook. The historically determined task confronting the revolutionary Marxists is that of mobilizing all exploited classes of Indian society for the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat and the ushering in of socialism.

The banner of revolutionary Marxism has been held aloft by small isolated groups of Marxists in India for the last three decades under trying conditions and despite formidable obstacles. They had to confront venomous Stalinist hostility and ruthless persecution by the imperialist government. These groups have consistently combated the reformism of the petty-bourgeois Socialist Parties and have exposed the treacherous betrayal of the masses by the Stalinist CPI and its perversion of Marxist ideology. They have endeavored to put before the Indian masses a programme based on authentic Marxism-Leninism-Trotskyism. They could not become effective because of their scattered existence and initially sectarian policies. They failed to close ranks and forge a united all-India Marxist party. Their separate existence was an anomaly in view of their ideological unity and almost identical programmes. The immediate task therefore is to unite these forces into a single all-India party. Several attempts made in the past to unite these elements were not successful. As a result of a new bid made during the last two years, however, three Marxist parties, the Socialist Party (Marxists), the Communist League, and the Mazdoor Communist Party (Trotskyists) have recently decided to merge into a single party, the Revolutionary Workers' Party of India. The RWPI has rallied under its banner ideologically and politically advanced cadres of the revolutionary Marxist i e, Trotskyist movement, steeled in numerous struggles against imperialism and indigenous capitalism.

CENTRIST GROUPS

In between the revolutionary Marxists represented by the Trotskyists on the one hand, and the Stalinist CPI and reformist Socialists on the other, there exist in India a number of left groups and parties torn and vacillating between the two.

Among these centrist groups there are parties like the Peasants and Workers Party in Maharashtra, and the Forward Bloc (Marxists), with a nationalist background but orienting towards Marxism. In the absence of definite Marxist conviction as yet, these groups are in a state of stagnation and have been experiencing periodical splits and disintegration.

There are also parties with a Stalinist past which yet possess the potentiality of moving towards a genuine Marxist position. They include regional groups like the Socialist Unity Centre (Bengal), Democratic Vanguard (Bengal), Communist Unity Centre (Andhra), the Bolshevik Party and the Lal Nishan Group (Maharashtra). The recent crisis in international Stalinism is pushing some of these groups towards the camp of revolutionary Marxism while others are experiencing internal dissensions.

Still other parties like the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party, which in general accept a Marxist position, are unable to rally the revolutionary forces in India because of their ideological vacillations and opportunist tactics. The

R S P represents the largest single non-Stalinist Marxist grouping in India while the R C P, which had once emerged as a sizeable group, is today suffering from serious internal dissensions under the impact of recent developments in the international socialist movement.

In relations with the above mentioned parties, the Trotskyists should adopt an attitude of friendly coöperation and close collaboration wherever possible, while

continuing to criticize their political vacillations and confronting them with a genuine Marxist-Leninist alternative. The possibility of either the RWPI, as the nucleus of a broad-based Marxist party, assimilating the best elements among them or of the Trotskyists uniting with some of these groups to form a bigger and stronger Marxist party of the Indian working class cannot ruled out in the near future.