

SHASTRI CONTINUES ON NEHRU'S PATH

By S. R. Singh

NEW DELHI -- Lal Bahadur Shastri, who succeeded Nehru as Prime Minister of India, has said that he will continue Nehru's tradition of "nonalignment" in international affairs and "democratic socialism" on the domestic front.

Khrushchev, cautious at first, greeted Shastri's statement enthusiastically. This line has been faithfully echoed by the Secretariat of the Communist party of India [CPI] headed by S.A. Dange. The CPI has given assurances that it will "support" the "progressive policies" of the new government.

It could not be otherwise so far as the Khrushchevists are concerned. Committed to building a "national democratic front" to fight what they describe as the "monopolists and imperialists" of India, they must trail behind the "national bourgeoisie." It is really a policy of surrender.

The "unanimous" choice of Shastri as Nehru's successor by the Congress parliamentary party was the outcome of a great deal of back-stage manoeuvring by the right-wing politicians. The American lobby in New Delhi actively canvassed for Shastri. The Industrial House of Birlas -- the real "king makers" in India -- also backed him four square.

The hard core of Congress leaders who promoted Shastri consisted of men like S.K. Patil (included as the Railway's Minister in the new cabinet); Atulya Ghosh, a reactionary from Bengal; Sanjeeva Reddy of Andhra (also included in the cabinet); and Kamaraj Nadar, president of the Indian national Congress. These men are openly pro-American.

The challenge to Shastri's bid came from another right-wing faction led by Morarji Desai, former Finance Minister, who is extremely unpopular in India because of his reputation for ruthlessness. He seems to have incurred the displeasure of the U.S. State Department and the Birla House. He was outmanoeuvred by the Kamaraj-Patil group, who at present control the Congress party apparatus at the centre.

Desai, despite his reactionary ideas and anti-Communist rating, may not have been acceptable to the American lobby because he was not prepared to change his unbending attitude toward Pakistan on the question of Kashmir. U.S. interests and a powerful section of the Indian bourgeoisie, it would seem, want to come to terms with Pakistan over the Kashmir issue on the basis of the efforts made by Sheikh Abdulla, the Kashmir leader released from prison some months ago after serving more than ten years. Sheikh Abdulla has been demanding self-determination for Kashmir. This could mean secession

from India and unification with Pakistan.

The Indian capitalists have good reasons for seeking a settlement with Pakistan. Together with U.S. investors, they are interested in the undeveloped markets and industrial potential of Pakistan.

Desai represents the section of the Indian bourgeoisie who fear that a permanent settlement with Pakistan would mean loss of the counterrevolutionary weapon of anti-Muslim Hindu communalism, which can always be wielded to divide the rank and file of the revolutionary masses. There are still 60,000,000 Muslims in India. Muslim-baiting is the stock-in-trade of parties like Jana Sangh and Hindu Mahasabha in India, just as Hindu-baiting is the stock-in-trade of their counter parts in Pakistan. The ruling classes in both countries use communalism to destroy mass movements.

The ferocious communalist riots recently in industrial cities like Calcutta, Rourkela, Jamshedpur, undoubtedly fomented by Hindu communalists as a "retaliating measure" against persecution of the Hindu minority in East Pakistan, demonstrate the extent to which the Indian bourgeoisie and their reactionary parties can still exploit communal sentiments to destroy the working-class movement in this country.

But whether Shastri will be able to fulfill his promise of a lasting settlement with Pakistan remains problematic.

Shastri has also said that he will endeavour to seek a settlement with China on the border question on the basis of the "Colombo proposals." But such a settlement means giving up another vehicle for stirring up chauvinistic sentiments against the Communist and radical movement in this country. Probably the Sino-Indian border dispute will never be settled, and for obvious reasons.

The Shastri government has, on the other hand, taken steps that should please Washington. An unofficial parliamentary mission was allowed to visit Taiwan some time ago, and there are now indications that New Delhi might establish diplomatic relations with the Chiang Kai-shek regime.

The government is moving fast to remove all the "irksome regulations" that have allegedly prevented foreign capital, mostly U.S., from flowing freely into India. All "leftist" talk in the Congress party concerning state trading in cereals, nationalization of the banks, etc., has been given up and the capitalists are being assured of a big role in the "democratic socialist pattern" under construction in India!

The period of relative stability in the political life of India, which existed under the unique leadership of Nehru, has come to an end. Already prices of cereals and other essential commodities

have begun to sky rocket. Food riots and looting of shops have occurred in some parts of the country.

Half-hearted regulations on food distribution, introduced by various state governments, have not yielded any positive results. But then the state governments are thinking not so much of bringing trade in cereals under control as importing grain from the United States under the so-called "PL 480 Programme" to meet the present deficits.

The Shastri government seems to hope it can solve these "domestic" problems through aid from U.S. imperialism. But this must eventually mean a more and more repressive policy in relation to the working class and other progressive movements.

The new government is still feeling its way. What might upset Shastri's apple cart, perhaps, are the internal conflicts in the Congress party. The "battle for succession" did not end with the defeat of Morarji Desai, who is only biding his time. In Delhi, there is already talk that the Shastri team might not last more than six months.

The working-class movement, happily, is demonstrating new signs of militancy although there is as yet no strong and united leadership capable of bringing the isolated struggles of workers in different parts of the country into a powerful national movement to challenge the bourgeois leadership. Only a few weeks ago, there was a general strike in Calcutta to protest the failure of the government to solve the food problem.

Partly due to pressure from the masses and partly due to factional considerations, the Dangeite leadership of the CPI has now begun a campaign for united action among all trade unions on immediate economic problems. Any all-India struggle of the working-class organizations would unleash new revolutionary forces despite the manoeuvres of the reformist leadership.

The recent merger of the Praja Socialist party and the Socialist party (two wings of the reformist socialist movement) into the Samyukta [United] Socialist party, although on the basis of a limited perspective of reformist struggles against the bourgeois regime, has nevertheless inspired a bit of militancy among the petty-bourgeois masses who are being drawn into the vortex of struggles.

A positive consequence of the "end of the Nehru era" has been a regroupment movement among various left parties. This can help the process of constructing a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist leadership.

Another positive development has been the emergency of an organized left wing within the CPI, which has published its own programme, openly challenging the class-collaborationist and opportunist politics of the Dangeite leadership.

The emergence of a new Communist party might be yet another rallying point for the revolutionary forces in India.