

THE ROAD TO PROLETARIAN HEGEMONY IN THE INDIAN REVOLUTION.

By R. PALME DUTT

THE problem of the Indian Revolution is to-day an acute problem for the whole advance of the world revolution.

The mass struggle in India has flared up with greater intensity than ever before. British Imperialism in decline, threatened at a dozen points, is revealed at its weakest point in India.

But the mass struggle in India develops under heavy limitations. It has not yet found its own revolutionary leadership or programme; it remains uncertain of the path forward. It is throttled under a leadership that fears it more than it fears imperialism, and is above all concerned to damp it down. The full forces of mass struggle have not yet been released; the peasantry, the decisive force of struggle, are still in great part passive. The whole movement is now in danger of ebbing without having reached a decisive stage, without having reached its full height, without even the alternative revolutionary line and leadership having been manifested.

What is the path forward in the present movement in India? This is the question of concern to the whole international movement. What are the conditions of advance? What must be the character of the next stage? What is needed to carry forward the present struggle, before it dies down, to defeat the attempts of the bourgeois leadership to throttle it, to bring it forward to a new and higher plane?

We must answer these questions in relation to the present struggle to-day, and give a clear lead for the Indian masses. Because the process of formation of an Indian Communist Party is still in the first stages, the responsibility that falls on the brother parties is the greater.

BRITISH IMPERIALISM IN INDIA AND THE GROWING CONTRADICTIONS, 1920-1930

The present struggle in India exceeds in its extent even the previous great revolutionary wave of 1919-1922. It is a noticeable contrast that, whereas the wave of 1919-1922 was

a reflection and echo of a wider world revolutionary crisis which had already developed since 1917 and reached India comparatively slowly, the present struggle in India has reached to great heights when the struggles in the leading capitalist countries are relatively limited, and is itself a stimulating factor of the rising new world revolutionary wave. What lies behind this transformation?

This transformation reflects, not only the enormous advance of forces in India, but also the increasing oppression of British imperialism in India in connection with the development of the crisis of British capitalism, commencing from 1920-21.

In 1919-1922 British Imperialism, alongside its violent repression of the revolutionary struggle, pursued a policy of concessions to the rising Indian bourgeoisie (Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, some tariffs, some bounties to industry, promises of assistance to industrial development). These concessions gave rise to the illusion that imperialist policy in India might be entering on a new stage, a stage of large-scale industrialisation of its main colony, in order to intensify the exploitation through new forms, and the utilisation on this basis of the Indian bourgeoisie as a subordinate partner under the control of British finance-capital. In fact, however, the basic policy of Imperialism was necessarily different; and the events of the subsequent years, and especially of the second half of the decade 1920-30, have abundantly confirmed this. The promises and the majority of the concessions vanished; and during the decade 1920-30 the face of imperialist policy in India has continually hardened.

1920-30 have been the years of the prolonged economic crisis of British capitalism. This crisis has had and is continuing to have profound effects on British policy. In 1920 British imperialism still felt at the height of its powers. With its principal imperialist antagonist of the past epoch smashed, with nearly two million square miles added to the Empire, with the artificial post-war boom,

hopes of still further expansion were entertained. The reconquest of the world market and of the temporarily weakened Indian market was judged easily within reach; the British share of Indian imports, which stood at 63 per cent. before the war, and had fallen to 56 per cent. during the war, was already back to 61 per cent. by 1920-21; large volumes of capital flowed out to India; concessions to India seemed to involve little danger; and dreams were indulged of further expansion and new forms of exploitation. The spirit of this period was expressed in the confident, aggressive policy of the Lloyd George Government, in contrast to the timid hesitancy and clinging conservatism of the later years.

Only slowly, as the economic crisis which began in the winter of 1920-21 grew prolonged, did the understanding begin to draw among British statesmen and financial and industrial leaders that the basic position of British capitalism in the world had permanently changed, and that the supposed solutions of stabilisation, rationalisation, etc., were not able to arrest the increasing process of decline. But as this has been realised, the whole trend of British policy has increasingly changed, and there is every sign that it is to-day on the eve of a still more complete transformation.

THE MORE BRITISH CAPITALISM FINDS ITSELF UNABLE TO COMPETE ON THE WORLD MARKET, THE MORE IT TURNS TO CONCENTRATE ON ITS MONOPOLIST PRESERVES IN THE COLONIES. This is the decisive character of the new trend. While total exports have fallen by one-fifth in volume, the proportion of exports going to the Empire has risen from one-third to nearly one-half of the total. To-day, policies for increased concentration on a closed-in Empire are in the forefront of British politics. Expressions of the new trend are found in the recent Bankers' Manifesto for an Empire tariff, the "Empire Free Trade" propaganda of Beaverbrook and Rothermere, the Trades Union Congress Empire economic memorandum, the similar memoranda of the Federation of British Industries and of the Association of Chambers of Commerce, and the declarations of policy of the Conservative, Liberal and Labour Parties.

What lies behind this new trend of policy which becomes increasingly dominant in British capitalism? With regard to the Dominions, much as these are brought forward in propaganda, the measure of achievement possible is limited. The real drive of the policy is thus necessarily directed, as its exponents increasingly admit, to the colonies proper, the subject colonies, *i.e.*, the Crown Colonies and India. Of these, the Crown Colonies, although of great potential future importance from the point of view of British Imperialism, represent to-day, with their fifty millions population, a relatively small base with limited immediate possibilities. It is India, with its three hundred and twenty millions population or three-fourths of the Empire, that constitutes the real base of any drive of Empire policy. **THE ESSENCE OF ANY POLICY OF "EMPIRE ECONOMIC UNITY," "EMPIRE DEVELOPMENT," etc., IS, IN THE LAST ANALYSIS, THE INTENSIFIED EXPLOITATION OF INDIA.** This is the direction to which the forces of British capitalism in its final stages of decay increasingly turn as the indispensable basis for any solution of the economic crisis.

"India," proclaims Lord Rothermere, "is the lynch-pin of the British Empire. If we lose India, the Empire must collapse." And he proceeds to argue the direct connection between the exploitation of India and the material basis of social-fascism:

"Do electors here at home realise that without our Indian trade it would be utterly impossible for the dole and pension services of this country to be maintained?"

The close inter-relation of the national fascism of Rothermere and the social-fascism of MacDonald and Snowden ("our incomparable social services" continually boasted of by them) could not be more significantly brought out. The rôle of the Labour Government in India is no incidental piece of unwelcome work imposed on them by imperialism; it is the essence of their policy.

THE MAINTENANCE OF DOMINATION IN INDIA BECOMES OF GREATER IMPORTANCE THAN EVER TO BRITISH CAPITALISM IN ITS PRESENT STAGE OF ACCELERAT-

ING DECLINE. Despite the weakening of England's economic position in India, India remains far and away the largest market for British goods, and the only market in which executive power opens out the possibility of improving the position. But the increase in strategic importance is no less. The more British policy becomes concentrated in the post-war phase on the Middle East, on China, and above all, on the offensive against the Soviet Union, the more India becomes the strategic centre and reservoir of strength. According to the *Economist's Armaments Supplement* (19.10.29), the armaments expenditure imposed on India has increased from £22 millions to £44 millions between 1913 and 1928 (actually an under-estimate, since it does not include the concealed and indirect military expenditure), or an increase of 100 per cent. in money value as against a wholesale price increase of 41 per cent. In the same period the armaments expenditure of Britain has increased by 49 per cent., and that of the Dominions by 33 per cent. The figure for India, which before the war was already twice that for all the Dominions put together, is to-day four times that for all the Dominions put together. Indian troops have been used wholesale in Iraq, Arabia, China, etc. The proportion of total imperial war expenditure drawn from India was before the war one-fifth; to-day it is over one-quarter. The military burden of the Empire is being shifted in an increasing proportion on to India.

But this drive of imperialism to intensified exploitation and domination of India does not meet with a smooth path. It comes into conflict with continually increasing contradictions and obstacles, inherent in the dynamics of development of the Indian situation.

What are these growing contradictions? Imperialist domination in India throttles economic development, and artificially maintains backward forms, at the same time as it increases exploitation. The agrarian economy of India, already overweighted by the hindering of non-agrarian economic development, is strangled by the double burden of direct imperialism and of the feudal and semi-feudal forms maintained by imperialism as the social basis of its rule.

Imperialist policy requires for the intensified

exploitation of India a rapid expansion, enlargement of the Indian market, etc. But the effects of the whole social system, of the whole system of exploitation on which it is based, produce the exact contrary. India, despite its vast possibilities, lags behind every country in the world. In Imperial Economic Committee's memorandum on the "Trade of the British Empire, 1913 to 1925-28" shows that, on a basis of 1913 as 100, Indian imports for 1927 stood at 100, and exports at 100, *i.e.*, had made **NO ADVANCE IN FOURTEEN YEARS**; whereas in the same period world imports had risen to 122 and exports to 118, while the imports of the Dominions rose to 126 and exports to 131, and Canadian imports to 152 and exports to 205.

But the growing contradictions lie, not only in the internal factors, but also in the play of external forces on the Indian situation. The weakening of the economic strength of British capitalism is reflected also in India in the increasing penetration by rival imperialist powers, especially Japan and the United States. The British share of Indian imports has fallen from 63 per cent. before the war to 45 per cent. in 1928. In the imports of cotton piece goods the British share of 97 per cent. before the war fell to 78 per cent. in 1927-28, while the Japanese share of 0.3 per cent. rose to 16 per cent. How can imperialism meet this situation of growing penetration by other imperialist powers? Only by a policy of closing the Indian market, of imperial preference. But this policy necessarily arouses intense Indian opposition. Until a few years ago it was ruled out as impossible (so the Indian Government representative at the Imperial Conference of 1923), and was explicitly condemned as a general policy even by the Majority Report (as well as without reservation by the Minority Report) of the Indian Fiscal Commission of 1922 as involving a too "serious burden" on Indian economy to be borne. Nevertheless, since 1927 this line of imperial preference has marked the new stage of tariff policy in India, and especially in the recent cotton duties.

The increasing intensity of imperialist policy concentrates on an increasing scale the opposition of all the principal forces of the Indian situation.

The world economic crisis, beginning in 1929, hastens forward the whole process.

THE QUESTION OF THE AGRARIAN REVOLUTION

It is the characteristic and dominant feature of the Simon Report, as of all imperialist propaganda, to make its whole basis and argument centre on the contention that India is predominantly, as to 73 per cent., a country of agriculture, and of very backward, antiquated agriculture; and to draw from this the conclusion that in consequence any progress "is bound to come very slowly indeed."

This, which is the root of the Simon Report's analysis, is a twofold lie and distortion of the realities of the Indian situation. In the first place, it deliberately conceals the fact that this overweight predominance of agriculture is not an antique, primitive survival, but a very modern, recent development directly consequent on imperialism, the proportion dependent on agriculture having steadily risen under British rule, even since as recently as 1891, from 61 per cent. to 73 per cent. In the second place, it fails in consequence to recognise that this gathering situation, so far from being a bulwark against change, is the direct driving force to revolution.

THE ESSENTIAL FACT ABOUT THE AGRARIAN SITUATION IN INDIA, AS IN RUSSIA PRIOR TO 1917, OR IN CHINA MORE RECENTLY, IS THAT IT IS NOT A SITUATION OF STAGNATION, BUT AN EVER MORE RAPIDLY MOVING, DYNAMIC PROCESS, LEADING DIRECTLY TO REVOLUTION, AND INSOLUBLE WITHIN THE CONDITIONS OF IMPERIALISM.

This continuing destruction of the existing small-scale industry and handicrafts, without corresponding machine industrial development, and additional to the normal factor of natural increases of population, lies behind the ever-increasing over-population.

The land system maintained by imperialism as its indispensable basis, hems in the growing masses driven to agriculture for the means of life. The numbers of these starving masses is increasing, but the cultivated area hardly increases more than a fraction. An immense area three-quarters of the cultivable land is untilled (as opposed to forest, barren or waste

land). The land hunger of the peasants cannot be satisfied within the conditions of the land system maintained by imperialism.

What is the consequence? The growing pressure is reflected in a ceaseless diminution and sub-division of holdings, and consequent economic deterioration and worsening of conditions. Every investigation, even over a short period of years, shows this process at work. The evidence of the Agricultural Commission found that in a Bombay district of a million acres between 1917 and 1922 the number of holdings under five acres increased by 2.6 per cent., those from five to fifteen acres by 6.8 per cent., and those from fifteen to twenty-five acres by 0.9 per cent.; while all groupings over twenty-five acres decreased heavily. And this is only five years! The same evidence reported that only holdings over twenty-five acres could be regarded as representing "the comparatively substantial agriculturist class which can with luck lay by a little capital," *i.e.*, as allowing any margin. Yet for the whole Bombay Presidency 88 per cent. of the holdings were under twenty-five acres, and 48 per cent. under five acres. Less than one-fortieth of the cultivated land area of the whole province was divided between half the peasantry. And from this slender basis heavy taxation, rent, traders' profit, and interest on loans has to be provided.

The consequent increasing impoverishment and starvation is attested by all authorities. The Director of Health for the Bengal Province states in his Report for 1927-28:

"The present peasantry of Bengal are in a very large proportion taking to a dietary on which even rats could not live for more than five weeks. Their vitality is now so undermined by inadequate diet they cannot stand the infection of foul diseases. Last year 120,000 people died of cholera; 250,000 of malaria; 350,000 from tuberculosis; 100,000 of enteric."

The imperialist organ, the *Observer*, commenting on the report of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture of 1927, writes under the title "From Bad to Worse" (2.10.27):

"An unavoidable conclusion from the study of the mass of material the Royal Commission has provided is that the Indian reformers of the past were not wholly wide of the mark in alleging economic declension . . . When all is said, there are aspects

of village life which point to agrarian deterioration instead of improvement."

Similarly the Calcutta correspondent of the *Times* reports (1.2.27):

"The health authorities of Bengal assert that the inhabitants are not so well nourished to-day as they were a generation or so ago."

The decrease in the total consumption of cotton goods, from 4.3 million yards in 1913-4 to 4 millions in 1926-7, despite the growth of population, is an indication of the same process.

But this process is not only one of increasing impoverishment and starvation; it is also one of increasing class differentiation and the direct expropriation of the mass of the peasantry. Driven to debt by the increasing burdens, the poor peasantry mortgage their holdings and lose them to the moneylender or rich peasants. In the twenty years from 1901 to 1921 in the province of Madras, according to the Indian statistician Pillai, the number of non-working landowners and tenants, *i.e.*, receiving rent, increased from 2 per cent. to 7.7 per cent. of the agricultural population; the number of working landowners, *i.e.*, small peasant proprietors, decreased from 48.4 per cent. to 38.1 per cent.; the number of working tenants and labourers increased from 49.6 per cent. to 54.2 per cent. "The tendency in the village now," declared the evidence of the Agricultural Commission, "is for people to be partially cultivators and partially labourers." The landless proletariat, working for wages, increased from 7½ millions in 1881 to 21 millions in 1921, as against 74 million "ordinary cultivators," and 3½ millions living on rents. But even of the "ordinary cultivators" it is estimated that an increasing proportion, which has been placed as high as fifty millions, eke out their living by working partly as wage-earners.

All this situation bears in an extreme form all the characteristics of a rapidly intensifying drive to agrarian revolution. And it is on top of this situation that the world economic crisis has fallen with its ruinous collapse in the prices of the peasants' products. The question of agrarian unrest has come to the front with new intensity. Already in the previous revolutionary wave of 1919-1922 the Moplah rising (suppressed with over 3,000 killed), and the Akali Sikh movement, attested the extent

of peasant revolt; while it was the successful attack on the rural police post at Chauri Chaura that led to Gandhi's significant retreat. Between 1921 and 1928, declares the Simon Report, there have been cases of agrarian disturbances in which "opposition to land revenue policy has expressed itself in a form that threatened a complete breakdown of authority." Local disturbances and suppressions with police and armed forces have been ceaseless. But the new intensity of a gathering wave has shown itself since the past two years.

By the beginning of 1929 Professor R. Mukerji, of Calcutta University, reported that the worsening of the peasants' conditions was pointing straight to "catastrophe" and "agrarian revolution" if energetic measures were not taken (*Calcutta Forward*, 17.3.29). Already in the *Indian Economic Journal* for April, 1928, he had described the spread of local peasants' unions all over the country, and their campaigns, in many cases with successes, against the landlords, against forced labour, etc. The *Times* of June 19th, 1929, writes that the conventional peaceful picture of the Indian peasantry is no longer accurate; the awakening has begun. During 1929, reports from many localities of peasants' conferences, of resolutions, of the election of peasants' committees (sometimes under the control of the Congress, but sometimes with open criticism of the Congress leadership), begin to be frequent in the Indian press. The still scanty reports of the battles of 1930 show that, in addition to the movement of revolt in the Punjab and border districts around Peshawar and the "Red Shirts," local outbreaks of varying degrees of intensity have developed in many parts.

But it is the necessary characteristic of any peasant movement that, consequent on their scattered position, they cannot independently realise the political conditions for their final success, but can only look to an outside centralised force to unite their struggle and realise their demands. The question of THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PEASANTRY IS THE DECISIVE FACTOR FOR THE BASIS OF POLITICAL POWER IN THE PRESENT STAGE IN INDIA. Three alternative forces exist which seek to win the

support of the peasantry — imperialism, the Indian bourgeoisie, and the Indian proletariat. Whichever of these can win the effective leadership of the peasantry holds the future in India.

Imperialism is powerless to solve the growing agrarian crisis, because it depends for its rule in India on the support of the landowning class, and cannot dispense with this prop. For this reason, it cannot touch the root issues of the agrarian question, or arrest the growing crisis. On the contrary, its own needs of revenue lead to continuous raisings of the land assessments, provoking continually fresh resistance of the peasantry. The appointment of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1926, and its voluminous report in 1927, showed the consciousness of imperialism of the all-importance of the agrarian question; but the Commission had to be explicitly forbidden in its terms of reference from touching on questions of land ownership and land tenure, and was thus reduced to complete unreality in its treatment (*e.g.*, the problem of the sacred cow had to be put forward as a principal cause of agrarian decay!) Not having the possibilities to act in this direction, imperialism was confined to very limited reform measures; a stingy measure of irrigation works, mainly throwing extra burdens on the peasantry and benefiting only a few richer peasants; some experiments in co-operative schemes, marketing, etc., again mainly benefiting the richer peasantry; and some measures limiting excessive users' interest (*i.e.*, against too much of the spoils going to the small village user instead of to British capitalism). For the wider issues, imperialism aims at the consolidation of holdings, *i.e.*, the accelerated expropriation of the poorer peasants, as in the bill brought in by the Bombay Government, which would have expropriated a very large number of the poorer peasants by enforced buying out; but this aroused the intense opposition of the mass of the peasantry, and the bill in question had in fact to be withdrawn.

The Indian bourgeoisie, which leads the existing Nationalist movement, is also powerless to solve the agrarian crisis. For the Indian bourgeoisie is closely interlocked with the landowning class, and its interests are bound up with the exploitation of the peas-

antry, being only opposed to the fruits of that exploitation passing to imperialism; with the consequence that it is determined not to set itself in opposition to the interests of the landowners (indeed, it is not even prepared to set itself in opposition to the feudal princes, obvious puppets though these are of British rule), or to attempt any basic change of the land system. On this rock the movement of 1919-22 broke down. The Indian bourgeoisie can only put forward to the peasantry an empty propaganda of the "Charka" type. Of late years the National Congress, not less than imperialism, has been giving increasing attention to the peasantry and the question of the agrarian problem; but, no less than imperialism, it is limited to the proposal of small reforms, without touching the root issues of land ownership. The increasing direction of policy towards the villages is shown in such indications as Gandhi's much-advertised tour of the villages in 1929, the holding of peasant conferences under Congress auspices, the organisation of unions, and even the leading of limited actions, as at Bardoli in 1928; but the whole drive of this policy has been towards limiting and restricting the action of the peasants, opposing the raising of wider issues, preaching subordination to the Congress, etc. The emptiness of the programme put forward is shown by the points recounted by Gandhi as those put forward by him in his tour of the villages (*Young India*, 25.4.29). These constituted: (1) boycott of foreign goods; (2), wearing of home-woven cloth; (3), against untouchability; (4), against Hindu-Moslem strife; (5), against drink; (6), no class struggle; all differences to be settled peacefully through the local authorities. The last point in this programme, in particular, makes clear the subordination to the interests of the landowners; as with imperialism, so with the Indian bourgeoisie, the sacred interests of existing land ownership cannot be touched; and therefore no expression can be given to the vital needs of the masses of the peasantry.

The third alternative force in the situation is the industrial proletariat. Here for the first time is a basically different factor; for the industrial proletariat has alone no interest in the exploitation of the peasantry, but is on the contrary by the necessary character of its posi-

tion and struggle the leader of the fight against all monopoly and exploitation. The industrial proletariat can thus alone set without reserve on its programme the abolition of all rents, feudal dues and indebtedness, and the conquest of the land for the working peasants and therefore can alone lead the peasants' struggle for liberation from the feudal-imperialist yoke.

But the Indian proletariat in large-scale industry is still small, relatively to the size of the country; and, although advancing in the development of class-consciousness and fighting unity at a very great pace during recent years, and already with a heroic record of prolonged class struggles, is not yet sufficiently politically conscious, organised and aware of the importance of independent political leadership. This is the crux of the problem of the present period. The advance of the proletariat to political consciousness and organisation is also the condition of the advance of the national struggle. But the present crisis of national struggle and mass struggle has broken out BEFORE the proletariat was strong enough to play an effective leading rôle.

Can the proletariat now advance sufficiently and find the way, **IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE PRESENT STRUGGLE**, to take the lead and guide the movement forward to new revolutionary forms, away from the dead throttling hands of the bourgeois leadership, **BEFORE THE PRESENT WAVE HAS SUBSIDED**, so that the inevitable bourgeois betrayal shall lead, not to collapse, but to a higher stage? This is the problem of the present moment. To answer this question, it is necessary to estimate the present degree of development, both politically and in organisation, of the Indian proletariat.

(To be continued.)

THE FIVE YEAR PLAN OF THE SOVIET UNION

G. T. GRINKO.

(Vice-Chairman, State Planning Commission of the U.S.S.R.)

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