

IV. The Fateful Meeting of the National Council (October-November 1962)

A couple of months before the October 1962 clashes on the India-China border, the National Council which was then meeting at Hyderabad had to take note of the deterioration on the border. It stated in a resolution:

“The armed forces of the two countries are so poised against each other that there is always danger of clashes taking place between them any moment. One incident has already taken place in which personnel on the Indian side were injured which has justifiably evoked resentment from the Indian people.” (Later, Nehru denied in Parliament that any Indian personnel was wounded.)

The question inevitably arose: what should the Party do under these circumstances? Should it support the Government of India in its measures of defending the border? How does support to defence measures against a socialist country square with the basic line of proletarian internationalism? After a good deal of discussion, the Council decided to “support the policy of the Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru of making all efforts to bring about a peaceful negotiated settlement of the border question even while taking necessary measures for the defence of the borders of the country.”

The situation, however, did not remain what it was at the time when the above line was adopted. The first half of September saw a serious deterioration in the border situation. Tension began to mount. Reactionary anti-Communist elements utilised this mounting tension in order to isolate and attack the Communist Party. Still more clashes occurred on the border.

It was against this background that the Central Secretariat meeting in the middle of October discussed the situation prevailing then. After a good deal of discussion in which it was found that the Secretariat was sharply divided the following statement adopted by a majority of the Secretariat was issued.

“The Secretariat of the National Council of the Communist Party of India expresses its grave concern at the serious happenings on the NEFA border. There have been clashes between the Chinese and Indian armed forces, leading to loss of life.

“The situation is all the more alarming in view of the fact that only a few weeks ago strong hopes had risen in the minds of our people that a climate for negotiations was being created and that meetings between the two sides for the necessary preliminaries were in the offing. All these hopes have been belied by the new tensions that developed on the NEFA border.

“This border has been comparatively free from disturbances especially in view of the fact that there has existed the McMahon Line, a virtually demarcated border line, between India and China. Thus one least expected serious differences and clashes on the McMahon Line.

“Reports of the Government of India show that the Chinese forces have crossed to the south of the McMahon Line and thus violated Indian territory, though the Chinese deny this. The Communist Party of India has always maintained that the McMahon Line is the border of India. Hence, all necessary steps to defend it are justified.

“The National Council Resolution of our Party at Hyderabad lent its support to the Government’s efforts at negotiations, while taking necessary steps for the defence of the borders.”

The publication of this statement and its explanation by the two spokesmen of the Party—the Chairman and the General Secretary—led to certain developments in the organisational field. But, before dealing with them, we may trace the political development of the border question and the way in which the Party reacted to it.

Hardly had a couple of days passed after the Secretariat statement was issued when the fighting on the border intensified

and the Chinese armies crossed the McMahon Line.

The questions then arose: can the Party continue the same line as was adopted at Hyderabad—the line of negotiation for a political settlement even while strengthening defence? There were comrades who held that the clashes of October 20 had qualitatively changed the situation and that it would now be wrong to talk of negotiations since the Chinese were deeply penetrating into our borders. Others, however, felt that the continuing military advance of the Chinese made it all the more important and necessary to tell the people that the problem of relations between India and China had ultimately to be solved through peaceful negotiations; the military measures that are undoubtedly to be taken to defend the border should not be considered as a substitute for, but supplementary to, the measures for a political settlement.

It was these two points of view that clashed against each other at the meeting of the National Council held from October 30 to November 1. Two alternative drafts to the draft by Dange were presented by Comrades EMS and Bhupesh Gupta on the one hand and by Comrade Ramamurti and others on the other.

A comparison of the two drafts with the Dange draft will make it clear that the points of difference between the majority and the minority of the National Council were not related to the need for defence. This, it may be pointed out, was subsequently acknowledged by Dange himself who, in his reply to the Communist Party of China, stated as follows:

“It must be noted here with special emphasis that at the time of the NC meeting of November, when this resolution was adopted, no one had yet been arrested and everyone of the leading comrades was present. The two alternate resolutions moved were in addition to the majority resolution. In these two drafts also, the slogan of defence was acknowledged. One of these drafts said:

‘The NC pays its homage to the memory of those who have fallen in the defence of our borders. The CP has always stood for the defence of the country, including the strengthening of the defence of our borders. In today’s condition, there is no question of any unilateral cease-fire by India. There is no question of surrender to superior might.’

“We are sure this was truly and sincerely meant. The of draft said :

“The Council pays its humble tribute to officers and jaw of the Indian army, who have had to face heavy odds in defend the country. It salutes the memory of those who have given th precious lives in fighting for the defence of the soil. It conv its heartfelt sympathy to the families of those who had thus to down their lives.

“The NC, at its Hyderabad meeting, expressed the Part support to the policy of the Prime Minister of India, Par Jawaharlal Nehru, of making all efforts to bring about a peace negotiated settlement of the border question even while tak measures for the defence of the country.

“Basing itself on that declaration of the Council, the Cen secretariat stated on the 17th October that all measures wh Government take to defend the territory south of the McMal Line are justified. Now that the Chinese armed forces are v within the territory south of the McMahan Line and advancing both in NEFA and in Ladakh, the Council all the m extends its support to the Government in all its requisite defe measures.

“The Council hopes that every step will be taken to impr the defence position consistent with the dignity, independence the basic policies of our country.’

“This too was truly and sincerely meant.

“Thus in the National Council no one at that time had difference of opinion on the correctness of the slogan of defer The NC was *unanimous* on the slogan of defending the coun Does it mean that the NC was unanimously giving an alib reaction, absolving them of their responsibility or was emphasising or had given up the slogan of peaceful negotiati Nothing of the kind....”

What then were the differences ?

First, the basic political position adopted by the majority that of “flowing with the current”, i.e., the current of bourg nationalism. The majority resolution is an unambiguous call all-out (ideological and political as well as military) attack on

Chinese—an attack which would hardly be distinguishable from the chauvinistic anti-China campaign indulged in by the most rabid anti-Communist elements. The minority was not prepared to take this stand. While it gave support to the Government’s measures of defence of the border, it refused to toe the line of the Government in looking upon the Chinese as an invader intent on grabbing our territory or subjugating our people.

It may be mentioned in this connection that Dange himself had, in his reply to the Chinese Party, made a distinction between “aggression in the popular sense” and “aggression in the capitalist-imperialist sense”. He said that China committed aggression in the former but not in the latter sense. No such distinction, however, was made in the resolution adopted by the majority controlled by him. On the other hand, a subsequent resolution adopted by the CEC talked of the Chinese advance threatening the plantations and oil fields of Assam. This resolution of the CEC was, in fact, in the spirit of the resolution adopted by the NC. In the draft of that resolution placed by the Dange group, it stated that the Chinese were motivated by bourgeois nationalism and a “peasant mentality”. Although they amended the draft and removed the words “peasant mentality”, Dange, in his reply speech, still harped upon that “peasant mentality”.

Second, the majority was not prepared to consider any negotiation and settlement with the Chinese except on the basis acceptable to the Government of India. For instance, they took the stand that no talks could be initiated unless and until the position held by both India and China on September 8, 1962, was restored. The minority took a more scientific position; it felt that what was necessary was to evolve a formula which would lead to such a settlement of the problem as would not be derogatory to either nation.

It may be pointed out that, year-and-a-half later, the Government of India itself took a more flexible attitude: the old formula “back to the September 8th line” was, for instance, so modified that instead of India advancing to the position she occupied, it would be enough if the Chinese retreated to the

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position held by them on that date. As soon as the Government came to accept this position, it may be further pointed out, the Dange group also took that position.

Third, the majority toed the line of the Government in another aspect—with regard to the correctness of securing Western military ‘aid’. The Dange group, of course, qualified the acceptance of ‘aid’ with the condition that it should be only on commercial terms! The minority held the view that receiving military ‘aid’ even on commercial terms would be the beginning of the process through which many other countries lost sovereignty and became dependent on the imperialist powers.

The line adopted by the majority was, in short, one of retreat from the ideological positions of the working class. It meant surrender to bourgeois nationalism and chauvinism, renunciation of struggle against our own ruling classes in the name of ‘patriotic defence of the country’, surrender to the ideology of imperialism according to which the role of imperialist powers is not one of subjugating independent nations but of helping them to preserve and further develop their independence and sovereignty. The minority could not naturally accept these policies.