

COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA
YEARS OF FORMATION
1921-1933

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Comrade Ajoy Ghosh, Editor of NEW AGE*, and Comrade Mohit Sen who is in charge of the journal, requested me to write an article on my reminiscences about the formative period of the Communist Party of India. Comrade Sen also requested me to see that the article did not exceed three thousand words. For a writer like me, it was indeed a very hard task to pack into this limited space all that I wanted to say. Nevertheless, I have made an attempt; but it appears that I have exceeded the limit. The article appeared in the "Party Congress Special" of NEW AGE in April, 1958. The original article was written in Bengali, and it was published on May 1, 1958, in the Party's Bengali daily, SWADHINATA.

Prior to the publication of the article in NEW AGE, it was seen through by Party leaders of the early period such as Comrades S. A. Dange, S. V. Ghate, B. T. Ranadive and Gangadhar Adhikari. It was also read out to Comrade Abdul Halim.

The article has been translated in Hindi and Marathi. Possibly it has been translated in some other

* NEW AGE, Political Monthly of the Communist Party of India Edited by Ajoy Ghosh and published from 7/4, Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi-1.

languages also—at least that was the idea. The Hindi version has been brought out in a booklet form by the *Janayug* Publications, Lucknow.

A booklet in Bengali has been published with idea of maintaining a written record of the events of that period. It is, of course, meant for the Party members also. Two or three names, which were not there in the original article, have been mentioned in this booklet. Besides, for purposes of clarity, I have also made some alterations here and there.

One point, however, requires mention here. The article is not a history of the Party during those twelve years. I have been able to touch only the fringe of this history, because the allotted space of three thousand words had set a rigorous limitation. Another big hurdle is that all the materials necessary for writing a history of the Party are not easily available. The documents of the Communist International are in the archives in Moscow. It is impossible to write a comprehensive history of the Party without studying these documents, particularly those relating to the Communist Party of India.

Anyway, Comrades who do not know anything about the formative period of our Party, will get at least some information from this booklet.

Calcutta,
August 20, 1959

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“That in the year 1921 the said Communist International determined to establish a branch organisation in British India, and the accused Sripad Amrit Dange, Shaukat Usmani and Muzaffar Ahmad entered into a conspiracy with certain other persons to establish such branch organisations with a view to deprive the King Emperor of his sovereignty of British India.”

(Quoted from the complaint filed on March 15, 1929, in the Court of the District Magistrate of Meerut by Mr. R. A. Horton, Officer on Special Duty under the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India).

An attempt has been made in this article to narrate, in broad outlines, my reminiscences about the way the Communist Party grew up in India. As I have pointed out earlier, it was very difficult to compress the developments of almost an entire epoch into the limited space of a few thousand words. Still, despite this obvious

limitation, I decided to write something about this period because, while I had not written anything previously, many people at home and abroad had said a great deal about the history of the formation of our Party. Such writings do not correspond, on some points, with actual events.

The Great October Revolution shook the World in 1917. The imperialist World put up a barrage of slanders regarding this Revolution. To cite a few instances, the world was told that women had been nationalised in Russia, that children had been snatched away from their mothers, etc. But despite this mischievous propaganda, our country also felt the impact of the Russian Revolution. The first wave of the Revolutionary terrorist movement had begun to recede by 1917, but other movements developed in a big way in that year. The movement for the release of political prisoners and the Khilafat movement may be mentioned in this connection. Many big meetings and demonstrations took place in different parts of the country. I used to participate in all the meetings and demonstrations held in Calcutta. From 1918, strikes of workers began to break out at many places. The Jallianwallahbagh massacre

happened in 1919, and a wave of indignation and protest swept over the country. Then came the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms Act (1919). But as it did not fulfil the aspirations of the people, strong protests were voiced against this Act too.

WORK BEGINS

These events formed the background of the year 1920, when I finally decided to make politics the profession of my life. Two years earlier, I had already become a wholtime worker of a literary association. It was through this association that I came in contact, for the first time, with Kazi Nazrul Islam, a Havildar in the 49th Bengali Regiment, who was later to become a famous poet idolized by the people. He came to stay with me in Calcutta following the disbandment of the Bengali Regiment. Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq was then known as a leftist leader. He decided to bring out a Bengali daily in 1920, and Nazrul Islam and I took charge of the paper. The evening daily, NAVAYUG (New Age), came out under our joint editorship. It gained popularity from the very first day owing to the forceful pen wielded by Nazrul

Islam. I, however, used to write most of the editorials.

Navayug was distinct from the other Bengali dailies in that it contained much more news about workers and peasants. Far from objecting to it, Mr. Fazlul Huq used to encourage this feature. One of my friends, who was not a political worker, told me: "Bengali papers are excessively sentimental. Do write something about the common people, especially about the workers and peasants." My friend was obviously influenced by the Russian Revolution. I readily responded to his suggestion. Even earlier, I had started moving among the sailors of ocean-going ships as well as among those who worked on the steamers which plied along the river routes in Bengal. Large numbers of people from my birth-place (I was born in an island called Sandvip in the Bay of Bengal) used to take up this job, and even now they do the same. Apart from writing about other categories of workers, which I of course did, I especially focussed the problems of the sailors in *Navayug*. I could not even imagine at that time that I was being slowly drawn towards the Third, Communist International through these writings in the paper.

FORMING THE PARTY

Lenin's Colonial Thesis was adopted at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920 (the Communist International was established in 1919). Following that, attempts were made on the part of the Communist International to establish contacts with the colonial countries. The Indian Government had become particularly vigilant since the Russian Revolution. They thought that something might happen in this country also, at least the Communist Party might be formed. That is why they built up anew their Central Intelligence Bureau (a respectable appellation for a Police department) under the Home Department of the India Government. Besides the provincial Intelligence Branches, which kept the political workers under surveillance in different provinces, the spies of the Central Intelligence Bureau also spread out all over the country—agents of this Bureau were even sent to work abroad. In these conditions of strict vigilance and restrictions, a few of us set out to accomplish a difficult task in different parts of India. Our aim was to build up the Communist Party in India also. It is needless to add that all of us were inspired by the Communist International.

Our work started centering round Calcutta, Bombay and Lahore. Compared to those who took the lead in forming the Communist Party in France and China in 1921, we were very few in numbers—at least I was fully conscious of my limitations. My knowledge of Marxism was very superficial. But when I took the leap into the unknown, I counted on two things—my faith in the people and my unquestioned loyalty to the directives of the Communist International. I had neither any money nor any means of livelihood. If I did not collapse it was only because of my mental strength. Now, after 37 years, I shudder to think where I would have been to-day if I did not have something of that strength of mind!

Poet Nazrul Islam also was involved when plans were being made in Calcutta regarding the formation of the Communist Party. He did not, however, join the Party because he thought that he would not be able to abide by the discipline of the Party. But he had always been our supporter. He became one of the founders of the Labour Swaraj Party that was formed later. Some of the terrorist revolutionaries had asked me to go ahead with the work and assured me that I could count on them. But I found

out subsequently that they were not with me. In 1922, I was joined in the work, first by Comrade Abdur Razzak Khan (now a member of the Rajya Sabha) and then by Comrade Abdul Halim (now a member of the Central Control Commission of the Communist Party of India). Comrade Khan had suffered imprisonment once and Comrade Abdul Halim thrice during the Non-cooperation movement. We got yet one more person as a friend in 1922. His name was Qutubuddin Ahmad. In the second decade of this century, he collaborated with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in running "Al-Hilal" and "Al-Bilagh," (Urdu Weeklies). In those days, Marxist literature was hard to get in Calcutta. If anything was available at all, we did not have the means to buy it. Qutubuddin Ahmad used to buy as well as read a lot of books. It was because of him that I could read *My Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution* by Phillips Price. It was the first book on the Russian Revolution I read. We could never have bought this book which was priced at 18 shillings. The door of his house had always been open for us. Later he also became one of the founders of the Labour Swaraj Party. During the Second World War,

he joined the Communist Party. He died on February 1, 1948. A few others had also joined us at that time, but they did not stay on till the end. The narrative, however, will get too long if I speak about everybody.

When speaking about Bombay, Comrade Sripad Amrit Dange's name must be mentioned first. He was expelled from the college when studying in the pre-graduate class, because of his participation in the student movement. He had also joined the Non-cooperation movement, but finding himself in disagreement with Gandhism, wrote a book called *Gandhi Versus Lenin* in English as far back as 1921. In those days, it required considerable courage to write such a book. In 1922, he also brought out an English weekly called *Socialist*. No journal under this name had ever been brought out in our country before. Dange had closer contacts with the workers than I. I shall talk later about others who were in Bombay.

Ghulam Hussain was working in Lahore. Previously he had been a lecturer in Economics in a Government college (Islamia College, Peshawar). Khushi Muhammad alias Muham-

mad Ali, was a friend of Ghulam Hussain. During the first World War (1915), some students of Lahore had fled India to prepare themselves for revolutionary work. Muhammad Ali was one of them. He went to Russia after the Russian Revolution and joined the Communist Party. It was he who called Ghulam Hussain to Kabul and had a good deal of discussions with him. Eventually, Ghulam Hussain gave up his job and came to Lahore to build up the Communist Party. From there, he used to bring out a monthly in Urdu called *Inquilab*. He also became the Secretary of the famous North-Western Railway Workers' Union. I had contact with Dange through letters, although I met him for the first time in Kanpur Jail in 1924. But Ghulam Hussain I not only never met, I never had any contact with him even through letters.

In 1922, Malayapuram Singaravelu Chettiar, and old lawyer of Madras, proclaimed himself a Communist. His library of Marxist books was an enviable one. He also joined workers' movement and had to suffer imprisonment for it in his old age. It was he who moved the resolution on National Independence in the Gaya Session of the Congress (1922).

COMRADES ABROAD

I should mention here that the Communist Party of India was also formed abroad. In the middle of 1920, a popular, powerful movement called *Hijrat* began in the Sind and the Punjab. The word *Hijrat* means to go away leaving one's country and friends behind in order to save oneself from oppression. As a result of this movement, nearly 18,000 Muslims left India and went to Afghanistan. Later, the Afghan Government refused permission to these people to enter that country. Afghanistan was a more backward country than India. It was not liked by a number of *Muhajir* (those who joined *Hijrat*) young men. They started insisting that they would go to Turkey and join the war on the side of Turkey. Finally, the Afghan Government gave them permission to proceed to Turkey.

Crossing the Hindu Kush, these young men reached Tirmiz (now in the territory of Uzbekistan). From there, when they were crossing the Amu Darya by boat, they were attacked by some people of the rebel Turkmen tribe. These people used to receive money and weapons from the British. The lives of the young men were saved because of the arrival of

the Red Army there. These young men reacted sharply to the fact that although they were Muslims they were attacked by Muslim, Turkmens. Hence, they fought with arms along with the Red Army to defend the Kirkee fort (in Turkmenistan) against the counter-revolutionaries. Subsequently, some of these young men joined the military school at Tashkent. Later on, they proceeded to Moscow, where they joined the newly-founded Eastern University which had been set up for teaching Marxism.

When they came to accept Marxism as their creed after they had studied for some time there, they formed the Communist Party of India (1921). After that, so long as the Eastern University existed, a branch of the Communist Party of India also functioned there. At one time, Comrade Naina Singh of Punjab was the Secretary of this branch. After having studied for nine months at the Eastern University, Indian comrades keenly desired to come back to their own country and to work here. Two of them succeeded in returning to India via Iran. Some others, however, did not find any route to return home. Ultimately they proposed to cross over to India across the Pamirs. The

Communist International agreed and gave them a guide who escorted them to the Pamirs. From there they came up to Chitral, which was within the Indian territory. They were arrested there by the Indian police and brought to Peshawar Jail. Thereafter they spent a long time in jail as undertrial prisoners. They were charged under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code. In 1923, sentences were passed on them—most of them were sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment, two to two years' rigorous imprisonment, and one to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment on various charges. *The Peshawar Conspiracy case was in reality the first Communist conspiracy case in India.* It did not, however, receive much publicity on this side of the river Attock. In those days, the North-West Frontier Province was a forbidden area. Among the prisoners of the Peshawar case who became active in Party work later, were Meer Abdul Majeed, Firozuddin Mansur (now dead) and Gauhar Rahman Khan.

I have narrated above how the efforts to form the Communist Party of India had begun in different places of India and abroad. No Central Committee of the Party, however, was constituted before December, 1925.

KANPUR CONSPIRACY CASE

In May 1923, Shaukat Usmani was arrested in Kanpur (he had come back from Moscow via Iran) and I was arrested in Calcutta. A few days later Ghulam Hussain was arrested in Lahore. All three of us were detained in various jails without trial under Regulation III of 1818. In December 1923, Nalini Gupta was also arrested and imprisoned under the same Regulation. He was not a member of any party, but proclaimed himself a nationalist revolutionary. He used to work as our courier between Europe and India. He liked the job, perhaps because of the element of daring in him. In March 1924, a charge sheet was filed against us in the court of the District Magistrate, Kanpur, on behalf of the Government of India under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code. The accused in this case were: (1) S. A. Dange; (2) Shaukat Usmani; (3) Muzaffar Ahmad; (4) Nalini Gupta; (5) Ghulam Hussain; (6) Singaravelu Chettiar; (7) Ramcharan Lal Sharma; and (8) Manabendra Nath Roy (M. N. Roy).

Only the first four of them were produced before the Court. Since Singaravelu Chettiar was confined to bed with illness, he was not

brought to the Court and was released on bail. Ghulam Hussain bought his freedom by confessing before the police and begging for mercy. After his release from the Andaman Cellular Jail, Ramcharan Lal Sharma was constantly harassed by the police. So he had sought the protection of the French Government in Pondicherry. He also could not be produced before the Court. And M. N. Roy was in Europe; so there could be no question of bringing him to the court. Proceedings were launched against four of us. Col. C. Kaye (later Sir Cecil Kaye), Director of the Central Intelligence Bureau, was the plaintiff. At the request of Col. Kaye, the Press called the case "Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case." Col. Kaye's motive was to implicate Soviet Russia—for propaganda purposes, of course.

In course of hearings on the case, a certain person could be seen sitting occasionally in the visitors' gallery. His name was Satyabhakta. It was by no means the name given by his parents. He had adopted this name when he lived in Gandhiji's Sabarmati Ashram—perhaps because there used to be a lot of experimentation with truth (satya) there!

The case was sent up to the Sessions court

in due course and the trial also concluded. The judge, H. L. Holme, sentenced each of us to four years' rigorous imprisonment. He was a notorious man. It was he who had sentenced 172 people to death by hanging in the famous Chauri-Chaura case. We were transferred to four different jails, where iron fetters were put on our necks and feet (this was the system in the U.P. jails in those days, not, of course, for people like Jawaharlal Nehru), we were completely isolated from the outside world. Meanwhile, the above-mentioned Satyabhakta announced in the newspapers that he had formed the Indian Communist Party.

In Rae Bareilly District Jail I once vomitted blood. It was the result of the havoc that had been wrought with my health owing to lack of proper food and living quarters while I was outside. The Civil Surgeon-Superintendent of the jail said that it was not serious at all. I was, however, gradually becoming weaker and weaker, had slow fever also and was fast losing weight. I was sent to the Almora District Jail in this condition in September, 1925. I was released from there on the orders of the Government of India on grounds of health, even before my term was over. I was very weak. My

weight had gone down to 78 lbs. So I stayed on in Almora, which is a health resort.

There I heard and read in the papers for the first time about the Indian Communist Party of Satyabhakta. I further read in the papers that a Communist Conference would be held in Kanpur in the last week of December. Comrade Sapurji Saklatvala had been requested in London to preside over this conference. He was said to have agreed in the beginning to come here, but finally the Communist Party of Great Britain did not give him permission. Satyabhakta wrote a letter to me in Almora congratulating me on my release and also requested me to attend the Kanpur conference. I had recovered considerably by that time. Besides, the temperature in Almora had dropped almost to freezing-point towards the end of December. Under such circumstances, I had to return to Calcutta. I thought of returning via Kanpur. On reaching Kanpur, I found that Comrades S. V. Ghate, K. N. Joglekar and R. S. Nimbkar had already arrived there. Finding them there, I felt somewhat reassured. For, I had heard about all three of them from Comrade Dange in jail. In Kanpur, I met for the first

time Comrade Ajodhya Prasad, Janki Prasad Bagerhatta and some others.

KANPUR CONFERENCE

The Chairman of the Reception Committee of the conference was Maulana Hasrat Mohani and President-elect was Comrade Singaravelu Chettiar (after our conviction he had presented himself at the Kanpur court, but the Government of India did not proceed further with the charges against him and, in fact, there was not much evidence against him). At the very outset, our viewpoint clashed with that of Satyabhakta. We held that according to the practice of the Communist International, the name of the Party would be "Communist Party of India." He said he did not subscribe to internationalism. His party would be a party on Indian pattern, that is, a nationalist party, and hence the name would be "Indian Communist Party." We firmly held to our viewpoint. Satyabhakta then left the Conference with his papers and files. He had claimed that the membership of his Party was more than 300. Who these members were we never came to know. Never since have I seen him. I understand that Comrade Ghate met him once in

Bombay. He told Ghate that he had retired from politics.

We brought together the Communists of various places in the country and constituted for the first time the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India in the Kanpur Conference itself. The Conference was held openly. Therefore, the Committee was also constituted openly. For this, we had to face plenty of criticism both at home and abroad. We deserved this criticism. But there was no other way either. Had we not joined the conference at Kanpur, Satyabhakta's separate Communist Party would have considerably hindered our work in the future.

Maulana Hasrat Mohani remained with us for some time after the Kanpur conference. He was a famous Urdu poet and a frontrank fighter in the freedom struggle of the country. He had been imprisoned many times and had suffered a lot of persecution. It was he who had moved, for the first time, the resolution on complete independence at the Ahmadabad session of the Congress (1921). His resolution was turned down by the delegates. Yet, he was tried in the sessions court for having moved this resolution and was sentenced to imprisonment

for life. The Bombay High Court, however, quashed this sentence. He had to leave our Party in 1927, when we did not approve of his joining the Muslim League. Our standpoint was fundamentally different from that of the Congress, and we know that the top leaders of the Congress participated in the Muslim League conference in Calcutta even as late as January, 1928.

When the first Central Committee of the Communist Party was constituted in Kanpur, Comrades S. V. Ghate and Janki Prasad Bagerhatta became its Joint Secretaries. In the beginning of 1927, we became suspicious of Janki Prasad's movements, and there were good reasons for it. Realising that we could not trust him any more, he left us of his own accord. After his departure, Comrade Ghate became the General Secretary of the Party. He held this post upto March 20, 1929. Much later, he was again elected General Secretary of the Party. Many sessions of the Central Committee of the Party were held in secret in the period from 1926 to January, 1929. In some years, the Central Committee met even four times. I do not know why our Central Committee meeting in Bombay in October 1928, was termed

as "war council" by the Sessions Judge at Meerut.

The first Constitution of the Communist Party of India was published towards the end of 1926.

WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' PARTY

It is necessary here to say something about the Workers' and Peasants' Party. After my arrest in 1923, I came back to Calcutta on January 2, 1926. Before my return to the city a party had been formed in Calcutta. It was known as the *Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress*. The party used to bring out a weekly journal called *Langal* (Plough). The famous poem of Nazrul Islam, "Samyabadi," was printed under different sub-headings in the first issue of this journal. I heard that this poem had been translated into Russian, though I never saw the translation. The Labour Swaraj Party was formed at the initiative of four friends. I have already mentioned the names of two friends. The other two were Hemanta Kumar Sarkar and Shamsuddin Hussain. The last-mentioned friend was the elder brother of Comrade Abdul Halim. Today, not one of these four persons is living except

Nazrul Islam. But, it is a tragedy that Nazrul, too, is dead in life on account of paralysis of the brain.

In February 1926, a Peasants' Conference was held at Krishnanagar (Nadia) at the initiative of the Labour Swaraj Party. At this Conference the name of the Labour Swaraj Party was changed into Peasants' and Workers' Party of Bengal. It meant that this party was no longer under the Indian National Congress. It was proposed that the Party should be called "Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal." But because the peasant representatives in the Conference were in greater numbers, the word "workers" could not be put at the beginning of the name of the Party. But, afterwards, in another conference the name was of course changed into Workers' and Peasants' Party. Gradually, the responsibility of running as well as editing the paper *Langal* devolved on me. Such things happened in those days because very few people were available. At this time, we changed the name of the journal into *Ganavane* (The Voice of the Masses), because the *Langal* (plough) symbolised only the peasantry. But, in reality, the journal was the mouthpiece of the toiling people. Although the

Communist Party of India was not illegal, it was difficult to work under its name openly. What we used to decide in the Communist Party was actually put into practice from the platform of the Workers' and Peasants' Party. The manifestos of this party were all drafted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In Bengal, non-communists were more numerous in the Workers' and Peasants' Party. But our work did not suffer on that account.

In the beginning of 1927, the Workers' and Peasants' Party was also formed in Bombay. Comrade S. S. Mirajkar became the Secretary of the Party. In that year, at the conference of All-India Trade Union Congress, we made acquaintance for the first time with Comrades Sohan Singh Josh and Bhag Singh Canadian of Punjab. At that time, Comrade Sohan Singh used to edit a monthly journal called *Kirti*. It was printed in Punjabi in the Gurumukhi script. Comrade Santokh Singh, who came from the University of Toilers of the East in Moscow, was the founder of this journal. He was suffering from tuberculosis and later succumbed to this disease. He was not acquainted with us or even with Comrade Abdul Majeed. In 1924, after being released from prison, he started work

at Lahore. Comrade Abdul Majeed not only did trade union work; he was among those few who were the founders of the famous Naw Jawan Bharat Sabha of Punjab. We had a discussion with Comrade Sohan Singh, and the result was the formation of the Kirti-Kisan Party (Workers' and Peasants' Party) in Punjab in 1927. Needless to say that trade union activities were spreading in Punjab also. There was already an organized union at Dhariwal.

In September 1928, Philip Spratt and myself went to Meerut, having been invited to join a political conference there. Comrades Abdul Majeed, Sohan Singh Josh and Puran Chandra Joshi (P. C. Joshi) also attended this conference. After taking his M.A. degree, Comrade Joshi was at that time preparing for the law examination in Allahabad. I was acquainted with him through letters and this was the first occasion when I saw him. At the Meerut conference, the Workers, and Peasants' Party was also formed in U. P. Comrade P. C. Joshi became the Secretary of the Party.

Philip Spratt and Benjamin Francis Bradley (Ben Bradley) were members of the Communist Party of Great Britain. George

Allison, another member of the British Party, had come here earlier. They were sent to India by the Communist International to help us in our work. All of them had to suffer imprisonment. Philip Spratt left the Party. Comrades George Allison and Ben Bradley are dead. Till their last moments, they cherished happy memories of our country.

We had already decided that in the last week of December an all-India conference of all the Workers' and Peasants' Parties would be convened in Calcutta, where these parties would be consolidated into one All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party. This conference was held as scheduled. Comrade Sohan Singh Josh was elected President of this conference. The All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party was formed.

At the time of this Conference, there were two meetings of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India. One meeting was held during the conference and the other at the end of the conference, that is, in the beginning of January 1929. At the latter meeting, Comrades P. C. Joshi and Sohan Singh Josh were admitted into the Communist Party of India on my recommendation. Among those

born in the Sikh community in Punjab and working in that province, Comrade Sohan Singh Josh was officially the first member of the Communist Party of India. But if we consider Comrade Santokh Singh as a Party member, then Comrade Sohan Singh Josh was the second Party member. It should be remembered in this connection that some others from the Sikh community had joined the Party abroad. And, at about the same time, Comrade Genda Singh (now Baba Genda Singh) also became a member of the Party in Calcutta. It was decided by the Central Committee that the name of Comrade P. C. Joshi should not be written down anywhere. In 1927-28, specially after the 1928 struggle of the workers, we felt that there was some danger of repression being launched against the Party. So we wanted to save young P. C. Joshi. But he could not be saved.

In Calcutta, when the Workers' and Peasants' Parties Conference was just going to begin, Doctor Gangadhar Adhikari came back to India from Germany after having stayed there for six years. He obtained his degree of doctorate in Physical Chemistry from the University of Berlin. He then worked there in a firm for some time. He became a member of

the Communist Party of Germany. He came to Calcutta direct from Bombay and attended the second meeting of the Central Committee. Since he was a member of the Communist Party of Germany, we took him into the Communist Party of India.

AFFILIATION TO COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

The Communist Party of India was not yet officially affiliated with the Communist International. We did not seek affiliation, because our Party was a small one. But even then the Communist International used to give recognition to our members. We learnt while our Central Committee was meeting, that at the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International two of our Party Members were elected as alternate members of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. This matter was also discussed in the meeting of our Central Committee. It was decided to send one of these two members to the headquarters of the Communist International. But before anything could be arranged, the Meerut events descended upon us.

The Executive Committee of the Com-

munist International had sent a message to Workers' and Peasants' Parties conference. It reached us only after the Central Committee meeting at the end of the conference. So we had no opportunity of discussing it. In that message, it was very clearly explained at the outset that the Workers' and Peasants' Party was not a Section of the Communist International. Then criticism was made of the formation of the political party on the basis of two classes. The party should have been formed on the basis of one class. We could not discuss anything about this at that time; but, individually, most of us did realise that this criticism was entirely correct.

STRUGGLES IN 1928

During the last part of 1927, workers' struggles began to break out in various parts of our country. In 1928, these struggles became more powerful and widespread. Not only every member of the Communist Party plunged into these struggles, but members of the Workers' and Peasants' Party (who were not members of the Communist Party) also wholeheartedly participated in them. At strike meetings, speeches were made not only on economic but

also on political issues. Our leadership was established amongst the workers in Bombay as also in some places in Bengal. As a result of the struggles of the workers in 1928, the trade union movement took a militant shape. The nature of this movement was absolutely new.

Through the struggles of the workers in 1928 a wonderful opportunity presented itself for building the Communist Party of India into a strong party. It became possible for a vast section of the workers to join the Party. The struggles of 1928 also influenced the toiling people. Many among them would have come into the Party if we could begin our work. But the Government of India was making preparations to come down on us with a heavy hand. When the Public Safety Bill came up before the Central Assembly we realised the dangers ahead. But we did not have the arrangements for carrying on work from underground. At this time, in Bombay, Comrades S. V. Deshpande and B. T. Ranadive were taken into the Party. During the Non-Co-operation days Deshpande lefts his college while Comrade B. T. Ranadive was an outstanding student of the University. He got first Class First in M.A. in Economics. Dr. Gangadhar Adhikari was his elder maternal

cousin. Inspired by Dr. Adhikari, Comrade Ranadive was attracted towards the Party.

In 1929 February, we co-operated with the Indian National Congress in Calcutta to organise a big demonstration against the Simon Commission. One special feature of this procession was the display of various posters with different slogans on our part. The poster with the slogan "Long Live Revolution" was first displayed in India in this procession. It is said by some that Maulana Hasrat Mohani was the first to give this slogan in India in the case brought against him for moving the resolution on complete independence. Once he read out his statement to me. But, today, I cannot remember whether this slogan was there in his statement. If it was there, then the credit for advancing this slogan for the first time should go to him. But if not, we were the first to give this slogan in India. After this, our last work in Calcutta was to lead a strike in the Clive Jute Mill. We won the main demands of the struggle. Immediately after this came the memorable March 20, 1929.

MEERUT COMMUNIST CONSPIRACY CASE

March 20, 1929, is really a memorable day

in the life of the Communist Party of India. The severe blow that we had anticipated from the British Government actually came on that day. At various places in the country, 31 persons were arrested under warrants issued by the District Magistrate of Meerut, and were brought to Meerut. They were members of the Communist Party of India, Workers' and Peasants' Party and trade union leaders. Among them Comrades Benjamin Francis Bradley and Philip Spratt were members of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Comrades Muzaffar Ahmad, Shamsul Huda, Ajodhya Prasad, Sohan Singh Josh, Meer Abdul Majeed, Puran Chandra Joshi, Sripad Amrit Dange, Sachchidananda Vishnu Ghate, Keshav Neelkantha Joglekar, Shantaram Savlaram Mirajkar, Raghunath Sivaram Nimbkar, Gangadhar Moreshwar Adhikari, and Shaukat Usmani were members of the Communist Party of India. Radha Raman Mitra had expressed his desire to become a member of the Workers' and Peasants' party before his arrest. Sibnath Bannerjee and Kishori Lal Ghosh were not members of any party. M. G. Desai also was not a member of any party, but he was a friend of ours. All other accused were members of the Workers' and Peasants' Party. In the list of the

accused, two more names were added later, of whom H. L. Hutchinson was not a member of any party while Ameer Hyder Khan was a member of the Communist Party of India. But the police could not arrest him. He built the Communist Party in Madras while in hiding.

During the case the accused got opportunities to make statements. We had already taken the decision that we would give such a statement as would help to publicise the ideology and programme of the Communist Party of India all over the country. Every accused made a statement during the court proceedings. Many among the members of the Workers' and Peasants' Party did not admit that they belonged to that party. Communist prisoners made statements as decided before. Apart from giving separate statements, they made a joint statement also. I think, if our Party members read these statements—especially the joint statement—they would be benefitted. All the members of the Communist Party admitted in the court that they were Party members. Dharani Kanta Goswami, Gopendra Krishna Chakravarty, Gopal Basak and Radha Raman Mitra stated that they were Communists by conviction. All of them except Radha Raman Mitra were

members of the Workers' and Peasants' Party. They (three first named) joined the Communist Party of India towards the middle of 1934. Gopal Basack was expelled from the Party some years ago. According to Party directive, P. C. Joshi also made such a statement because the Government did not possess any proof that he was a member of the Communist Party of India. In his statement, Hutchinson also stated that he was a Communist. On his return to Great Britain, he joined the Labour Party.

Chaudhuri Dharambir Singh was released from the Magistrate's Court. Sibnath Banerjee and Kishori Lal Ghosh were released from the Sessions Court. And the rest were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment—transportation for life, 12 years, 10 years, 7 years, 5 years, 4 years and 3 years R. I.

Before the judgment was delivered by the the Sessions Court, the sixty-eight-year old engineer, Dhundiraj Thengdi, died. He had gone to Poona after being released on bail. He was the President of Workers' and Peasants' Party in Bombay. After the case was committed to the Sessions the Chief Counsel for the Government, Mr. Langford

James, died. We were arrested on March 20, 1929 ; but the judgment was delivered by the Sessions Judge on January, 16, 1933. The printed papers relating to the case (the paper-books) came to ten thousand foolscap folio pages. The Meerut conspiracy trial was the biggest and longest State trial in the world. Even the long-drawn Sacco-Vanzetti case did not continue from day to day.

Just before the judgment of the Sessions Court was delivered Shaukat Usmani started behaving in such a manner that there was no other alternative but to turn him out of the Party. Nimbkar also began to show signs of weakness after he was sentenced to 12 years' rigorous imprisonment. So he was also expelled from the Party.

Communist ideology came to be established in India from the time of the Meerut Conspiracy Case. In Bengal jails and camps, terrorist detenus started reading Marxist literature. Convicted prisoners in the Andaman Jail also did the same. Hundreds of them joined the Communist Party of India after their release.

After our case started in March 1929, M. N. Roy, then in Europe, was turned out of the Communist International. At one time, he

had been put in chagre of the Eastern Department of the Communist International. I do not know why he was turned out. But I also had complaints against his work. I had however no opportunity of getting any information whether my complaint was also one of the reasons of his expulsion. After he was turned out we thought that he would come back to India and try to create some sort of trouble. In fact, he did so. He started distributing manifestos under the name "Revolutionary Committee to organise the Communist Party of India." He knew that the Communist Party of India was not formally affiliated to the Communist International. So he probably hoped that, through this method, he would be able to force the Communist International to take him back. But he had miscalculated.

POST-MEERUT EVENTS

In 1930, the Communist Party of India was formally affiliated to the Communist International. After this, M. N. Roy stopped distributing his manifestos under the name of the "Revolutionary Committee to organise the Communist Party of India." Communist Party of Indo-China was also affiliated with the Com-

munist International at the time when the Communist Party of India got the affiliation. The Draft Platform of Action of the Communist Party of India was published at this time. On December 19, 1930, it was printed in the International Press Correspondence. But Party leaders in Bombay failed to consolidate the All-India Party on the basis of this programme; on the contrary they had differences and split among them. At this time, the Communist International also temporarily withheld affiliation of the Communist Party of India. Chaos and disorganisation in the Party all over the country appeared in an acute form.

Comrades in Calcutta—Abdul Halim, Randerendra Nath Sen, Somnath Lahiri and others—had been carrying on the work of the Party under the name "The Calcutta Committee of the Communist Party of India." Once Stalin mentioned the work of the Calcutta Committee either at an enlarged meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Union or at the Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. I do not remember now the exact occasion. In spite of repeated requests from the Calcutta Committee to give an all-India shape to the

Communist Party, there was no response from the Party leaders in Bombay. So they started sending reports to the Communist International through Various channels.

In 1932, Philip Spratt, Ben Bradley and I got an opportunity to send a report, from Meerut to the Communist International. These reports produced results. In May 1932, the Central Committees of the Communist Parties of China, Germany and Great Britain sent an open letter to the Communist Party of India. In that letter, they strongly criticised the Indian Communists and urged them to form an All-India Party on the basis of the Draft Platform of Action. After more than a year, on July 16, 1933, an open letter came again from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the Communists of India. In this letter, their criticism was much more severe and sharp. By giving examples from the work of the Communist Parties of the Soviet Union and China, they tried to explain in various ways to the Communists of India the necessity of forming an All-India Party. But they also praised the work of the Calcutta Committee of the Communist Party of India and stated:

"This is why we welcome the *Calcutta Com-*

mittee of the Communist Party of India, which energetically took up the call for the formation of an All-Indian Communist Party, which understood the necessity to shift the centre of gravity of Party work to activities on an all-Indian scale and which proposed to put an end to the pitiful chapter in the history of the Communist Party of India, the chapter of petty squabbles and splits, and to open a new page by the formation of a powerful united Communist Party of India."

An appeal had been filed in the Allahabad High Court against the severe sentences passed on us by the Sessions Court. On August 3, 1933, judgment on this appeal was delivered. Our sentences were reduced. The terms of Dange, Usmani and myself were reduced to 3 years' rigorous imprisonment, Philip Spratt's sentence was reduced to 2 years' rigorous imprisonment and the sentences of Ghate, Ben Bradley, Mirajkar, Joglekar, Nimbkar, Sohan Singh Josh, Abdul Majeed and Dharani Goswami were reduced to one year's rigorous imprisonment. Gopen Chakravarty's sentence was reduced to 7 months' rigorous imprisonment. Nine persons, including Desai, Hutchinson, Radha Raman Mitra were acquitted. The period already

undergone by Dr. Adhikari, P. C. Joshi, Ajodhya Prasad, Shamsul Huda and Gopal Basack, that is till August 3, 1933, was the punishment awarded to them. In other words, they were all released on that very day.

Those who had been sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment were also released in November, 1933.

THE ALL-INDIA PARTY

The members of the Communist Party, after their release, again started trying to pull the Party out of mire with the help of the Calcutta Committee. Among the Bombay comrades, some co-operated, others did not. As a result of this effort, a secret Conference of the Party was held in Calcutta in December 1933. At that Conference, a new political resolution and a new constitution of the Party were adopted and the Central Committee was also elected. Dr. Adhikari became the General Secretary. Comrade Ben Bradley went to Europe with this report and submitted it to the Communist International. The Communist Party of India again became a Section of the Third, Communist International.

Although it was practically illegal, the

Government of India had never formally declared the Communist Party illegal. The judgment of the Allahabad High Court in the Meerut Conspiracy Case had considered the Communist Party as an illegal organisation. So in 1934, Government of India formally declared the Communist Party illegal.

I will conclude after saying a word more. Many of our leading comrades of the present generation think that members of the Communist Party had never become members of the Indian National Congress before "The Anti-Imperialist People's Front" document was written by R. Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley. But this idea is totally wrong. Those who first started building the Party were also in the Congress. It was I alone who had not been a member of the Congress before 1926. Three members of the Party's Central Committee which was constituted in 1925, were also members of the All-India Congress Committee. Amongst the accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, seven were members of the All-India Congress Committee. And five among these seven were members of the Communist Party of India.

It was the Communists who fought again

and again in the Indian National Congress for the adoption of a resolution on the complete independence of India. They were, of course, always voted down owing to the opposition of the Congress leaders. The resolution on complete independence was passed at the Madras Session of the Congress in 1927. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and many other Congress leaders supported it. At the same time, however, a committee was set up with Pandit Motilal Nehru as its Chairman, to prepare a draft constitution for Dominion Status. A Constitution was actually drawn up. The Madras Resolution on complete independence was rescinded in the Calcutta Session of the Congress in 1928, and the Nehru Report (the constitution) was adopted. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru remained absent when the resolution on complete independence came up in the Subjects Committee meeting. Sri Subhash Chandra Bose voted with Gandhiji against the resolution, though he spoke in its favour in the open session. Members of the Communist Party were among the main supporters of the resolution in this session. Our members should know these facts, otherwise they will not be able to write a correct history of our Party in future.
