

## ROOTS OF OUR LEFT-SECTARIAN AND REFORMIST ERRORS IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD (1922-1947)

### NATIONAL BOURGEOISIE AND THE WORKING CLASS IN THE FIGHT FOR HEGEMONY IN THE NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE

The central theme of the author is the formulation that in all Party's major inner-Party controversies, in that of 1947-51 and in those of 1953-56 and of 1961-62, the struggle was never between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism or dogmatism. But every time revisionism was fought by dogmatism and Left-sectarianism or vice versa.

The author concedes that there were "considerable elements of Marxism-Leninism" making their appearance in comrades of both trends. But basically none of them were correct.

#### TWO DEVIATIONS—AUTHOR'S POSITION

He sharply criticises the comrades of the majority trend who are only attacking the Left-sectarian trend in the Party, which they say was the main deviation of the Indian Party throughout this period. He says, Dange and comrades of his persuasion have "a particular mode of interpreting Party history"; they ignore the Right-opportunist approach adopted by the then CC but they attack 1949 PB Tactical Line and the succeeding documents of 1950; they present the inner-Party struggle in the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th Party Congresses as the growing assertion of Marxism-Leninism against dogmatism and sectarianism. So the author proceeds to set the record right by reviewing the major controversies of 1953-54 and 1961-62 periods.

It is good that the author sets about the task of making an objective and searching review of the various periods of Party history since 1947, exposing the revisionist and reformist mistakes, as well as dogmatic and Left-sectarian mistakes.

But is he really doing it objectively? He claims to conduct an even struggle against both the deviations. But actually he seems to proceed from the "theory" that India, its national movement, being under the domination of the bourgeoisie politically, bourgeois economy being dominant—the main deviation in the Indian Communist Party must be revisionism, rather than Left-sectarianism.

In the beginning of the document, the author, as we have seen, traced on the strength of a quotation from Lenin the class roots of both types of opportunism. He shows how "the broad strata of the petty bourgeoisie, the small masters, who in the process of capitalist development, join the ranks of the proletariat... become purveyors of alien-class ideology into the ranks of the Party." Thus both bourgeois reformism and petty-bourgeois "revolutionism" penetrate into the Party.

But on page 69 of his document, while criticising Comrade Dange for carrying on a one-sided struggle against "Left-sectarianism", the author makes the following formulation:

Yet in a country like India, where the bourgeoisie is at the head of the nation, bourgeois nationalism can breed on the soil of revisionism, rather than of Left-sectarianism.

Bourgeois nationalism, he defines as "blind and uncritical support to bourgeois government" and he says Left-sectarians cannot be accused of bourgeois nationalism or of abandoning proletarian internationalism.

The author, therefore, while he sets about fighting both deviations equally, is compelled to fight revisionism in the main because, according to him, that is the main danger threatening the Indian Party.

Here the question arises: Is he not committing the same mistake which he accuses the majority of—but from the other end? In concentrating his attack on revisionism, is he not ignoring the dogmatic Left-sectarian danger? And is he opposing the alleged revisionism of the majority by Marxism-Leninism or by a sectarian leaning?

It is a fact that we have often corrected a Right-opportunist type of mistake and fallen into a mistake of the opposite type. There have also been cases of the opposite type. But the history of our Party is not just a succession of Right- and Left-opportunist mistakes where the correct application of Marxism-Leninism to the problems and realities of the Indian national revolution has gone by default. This is an incorrect and a subjective approach which does not do justice to the CPI and to the international communist movement which have made valuable contribution to the scientific solution of the problems of India's national revolution despite the mistakes.

But is it not a fact that in checking up the application of Marxism-Leninism, we have always to conduct a vigilant and constant struggle against both revisionist and sectarian deviations? This is, of course, true. In the capitalist world, the proletariat and its Party are struggling in the environment of bourgeois society and against its ideology and politics and in these circumstances bourgeois and alien tendencies often penetrate inside the Communist and Workers' Parties. This is how revisionism and reformism arise.

Then again when the proletarian Party has crystallised out and has built an independent mass movement based on the international working-class ideology of socialism, the opposite deviation arises, of not applying the Marxist-Leninist science to the concrete reality and the problems facing the particular Party, of repeating set principles, of skipping stages, of running ahead of events. This is how sectarian and dogmatist mistakes arise.

Both the deviations are departures from Marxism-Leninism and are alien-class tendencies and have to be equally fought. This has been stressed again and again by Marx and Lenin and by the leaders of the international communist movement.

#### ABSTRACT & MECHANICAL

It is true this fight has to be carried out equally and simultaneously against both the deviations in order to ensure that the policy and the practice of the Party are correct and effective in every given situation.

But this cannot be done mechanically, in abstraction from the stage of the revolution with which the Party is faced and without regard to the specific features of the Party itself. Our quarrel with the author is that he misses just this point. He is carrying out his equal and simultaneous fight against both the types of deviations, mechanically in abstraction from the concrete problems of fighting for and completing the national-democratic revolution with which our Party is faced. He also disregards the peculiar features which our Party has acquired in the course of its historical development. This is the source of the inadequacy of his analysis and the incorrectness of some of his conclusions.

In the case of a working-class Party like ours which is in the stage of fighting for or completing the national-democratic revolution, the Left-sectarian and revisionist deviations assume a particular form.

The revisionist and dogmatist deviations with which proletarian parties in advanced capitalist countries are faced are again of a different form.

#### LENIN'S WARNING

In the case of backward countries where the proletariat is faced with the task of fighting for and completing the

national-democratic revolution, Lenin gave two clear warnings:

1. He emphasised "the need for determined struggle against attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries..." and that the future proletarian parties in these countries "shall be brought together and educated to understand their special tasks, viz., to fight the bourgeois-democratic movements within their own nations."

2. At the same time, Lenin emphasised that the communists "must uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even in its embryonic form." He also stressed "the need...to give special support to the peasant movement against landlords, against the land-ownership and against all manifestations of survival of feudalism and to strive to lend the peasant movement the most revolutionary character."

These quotes are from the preliminary draft theses on the national and colonial question, prepared by Lenin in 1920 for the Second Congress of the Communist International.

Thus 40 years ago, when the foundations of the theory of national-liberation revolution in backward countries were laid, the first point stressed was that the special tasks for which the Communist Parties in these countries have to be trained is the fight for the national-liberation revolution, i.e., the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The warning is given that it is not to be painted in communist colours, not to be understood as a fight of the working class and the toiling masses against capitalists, but as a fight of the entire patriotic people, including the national bourgeoisie, for national political independence, a fight against the imperialists, feudalists and the compradore vested interests.

The second point emphasised is that, while fighting in

the national-revolutionary movement and building and broadening its unity, the Communist Parties have to maintain the independence of the proletarian movement and develop peasant revolutionary movement against feudalism and landlordism, and not to dissolve themselves (merge) in the national movement.

These two basic points, which were emphasised at the very beginning of the formulation of the theory of national revolution against imperialism in underdeveloped countries, enable us to see the specific character of the Left-sectarian and revisionist deviations in the revolutionary work of the working-class parties in these countries.

Thus Left-sectarian deviation in these countries consists in not understanding that identification with, being in the forefront of, the national-liberation movement (bourgeois-democratic movement) is the special and the main task of the working-class parties in these countries; in not understanding that the main contradiction, the line of class conflict in this stage of the revolution is between imperialism and its feudal and compradore bourgeois allies on the one hand and the entire people including the national bourgeoisie on the other—and not between the national bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

While identifying themselves with the national-liberation movement, if the working-class parties dissolve themselves in these movements, do not promote the independence of the proletarian movement and develop peasant revolutionary movement, they would be committing revisionist or reformist deviations.

As soon as we formulate the two deviations in this manner, it becomes clear that the fight against both these deviations has to be conducted in the context of the proletarian parties of these countries, clearly understanding that their specific and main task was to fight for the national-liberation revolution and for its completion.

In India, our Party had to bear in mind that the simultaneous and equal struggle against both the deviations had to be conducted in the context of the central task of fighting for national political independence (before liberation) and of fighting for national economic independence (after liberation). We cannot make a correct estimation or evaluation of the two deviations inside our Party in the various phases, nor fight them correctly in the present if we miss this context of the national task, which is also the main task of the stage of the revolution. Class approach is no doubt basic for the fight against both the deviations as they are a reflection of bourgeois and alien-class influence inside the working-class party. But it has to be developed and applied in the context of the specific and the main task which faces our Party—viz., the national-liberation revolution and its completion. That being a bourgeois-democratic revolution, a correct class approach can only be developed in the context of correct estimation of the role of the national bourgeoisie in our country, and in our national-democratic revolution in its various phases. Our contention is that the author's analysis and his mode of fight against these deviations suffers from this mistake.

In reviewing the developments and mistakes of our Party in the post-independence period, the author asserts that we have always missed the class approach. Before we examine this view and show how this methodology leads to shortcomings in analysis and to incorrect fight against deviations, it would be worth while to take a look at pre-independence developments in our Party and the mistakes of our Party.

#### DEVIATIONS IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

It is not proposed to go into details of the policy shifts of our Party in the pre-independence period. This would

require deep study and research and collective work which, of course, is overdue. It is necessary to recall the experience of the pre-independence policy shifts, because the deviationary tendencies which made their appearance in the post-independence period have their roots in the past.

Though there are differences amongst us on the evaluation of the pre-independence Party history, I think everyone will readily agree that the two periods in the pre-independence history when the Party suffered the greatest setback and damage were: first, the period of early thirties when Left-sectarian mistakes were committed and, second, the period of 1942-47 when certain Right-opportunist mistakes mentioned above were committed.

From this general statement, it would appear as if in the pre-independence period, we suffered alternately and equally from both the deviations. But when we go into the matter more deeply, we will have to concede that in the pre-independence period, the main mistake from which our Party suffered most was the inadequate understanding of the specific and main task which faced us, viz., the national-liberation revolution; incorrect understanding and approach towards the national movement and its organ, the National Congress, that developed under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi; incorrect understanding and inadequate concrete study of the role of the Indian national bourgeoisie in the revolution. Only in the context of these mistakes can we correctly and concretely examine our Right- as well Left-opportunist deviations—errors of both types in our task of uniting with the national bourgeoisie, while at the same time counteracting its compromising tendency, in our task of identifying with the national movement while at the same time building the Communist Party, independent proletarian movement and the revolutionary peasant movement.

Of course, these mistakes did not dominate the entire

pre-independence period but only the two periods of setback mentioned above—the period of early thirties and the period from August 1942 to 1946.

In the other periods, i.e., in the period of rise of the Party up to Meerut arrests (1939) and in the period after 1936 up to 1941—when the Party had a correct attitude to the national movement and its organ, the National Congress, it was able to make significant contribution to the strengthening of the revolutionary trend in that movement and also to register outstanding success in putting the Communist Party as an all-India political force and in building independent proletarian movement and later (after 1936) a strong peasant movement. There were no doubt shortcomings in the periods of advance, as there were certain achievements in the periods of setback.

#### PARTY-LINE IN THE PRE-MEERUT PERIOD

Our Party crystallised out of the revolutionary wing of the national-liberation movement under the impact of the Russian socialist revolution, as has been correctly emphasised in the preamble to our Constitution (1958). This holds good for the pioneer groups abroad—those in Europe and California (USA) and those which emerged in India in the early twenties. It is significant that communist groups in India emerged only in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab, which were traditional strongholds of the extremist national movement under Lal, Bal and Pal.\* The first coordinated action of these groups was to put forward a programme of demands and action for the national movement in the spirit of Lenin's theses of 1920 referred to above. This programme put forward the goal of complete national independence in place of dominion status demanded then by the national movement. It concretised

\* i.e. Lala Lajpat Rai in the Punjab; Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra and Bepin Chandra Pal in Bengal.

this goal, of independence, for all sections of the people—by demanding the removal of the imperialist stranglehold on our economy, by demanding abolition of landlordism and princedom, and democratic liberties.

It demanded transfer of power to the Indian people so that they could, through their freely elected *National Constituent Assembly* set up a *democratic republic*. It called for the overthrow of the British imperialist rule through a *mass revolution* brought about by the unity of all the forces of the national movement in which the organisations and actions of the peasants and workers were to play a significant part.

This programme which was being put forward almost in every annual session of the National Congress since 1921-2 played a significant role in giving a radical direction to the Left forces inside the Congress, who were seeking new paths after the Bardoli withdrawal of the first non-cooperation struggle.

The task of uniting the various communist groups into an all-India organised Party, the task of getting down to building a militant trade-union movement and peasant organisations though planned, lagged behind mainly because of Cawnpore conspiracy arrests (1923-4). In 1925, the first Communist Conference met at Kanpur and united the various local groups into a single all-India Party—the Communist Party of India. This is now accepted by all of us as the year of the foundation of our Party.

From 1926-27 onwards, the overdue task of building a militant trade-union movement and of initiating peasant movement was taken up. In a short time, a massive strike movement broke out in the industrial centres of Bombay and Calcutta and mass militant trade unions arose there.

In the Punjab and the UP there were beginnings of peasant movement.

Workers' and Peasants' Party organisations were formed in various provinces as the open platform of the com-

munists, which voiced the programme of national independence.

Youth Leagues sprang up everywhere. They were being attracted by that programme and by the workers' and peasants' organisations.

All the communist workers who were active in these movements were members of the National Congress and some even members of the Congress Committees.

The anti-Simon Commission demonstrations called by the Congress leadership assumed militant forms under the participation of working-class organisations and other militant elements.

There were two opposing trends inside the Congress leadership. One called for temporising for the time being and negotiating with imperialist government for liberal constitutional reforms, while the other called for the declaration of the goal of complete independence and launching of mass struggle.

#### A PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANT ADVANCE

The Communist Party had emerged as a political force spearheading not a negligible mass movement and putting its weight on the side of the latter trend. This was demonstrated at the Calcutta session of the National Congress (December 1928) when the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Parties' Conference, not only passed resolutions on the lines of the programme mentioned above, but organised a massive workers' demonstration before the Congress pandal for these demands.

A shrewd representative of British monopoly capital in India, President of the Associated Chambers of Commerce (British) understood the significance of these developments. Speaking at the annual conference of the Chamber at Calcutta in December 1928, one Mr. James pointed to the "Bolshevik danger", called for repressive action from the Viceroy who was inaugurating the session.

The Viceroy responded three months later, on March 20, 1929, with the countrywide arrests of all militant trade-union and communist leaders. It was a blow aimed at not only crushing the communists but also at isolating the rising communist-led militant mass movement from the main stream of the national movement.

This was a period of significant advance in our Party history. Our leadership then proceeded generally under the guidance of Lenin's thesis and of the two tasks outlined therein. A fight against the compromising tendencies of the national-bourgeois leadership against which Lenin had warned in his colonial commission report to the Second Congress of the Communist International, was conducted by our leadership but within the framework of the organisation of the national movement. M. N. Roy, who was in touch with the CPI leadership on behalf of the Comintern, up to 1927, held the view then that the national-bourgeois leadership will come to an agreement with imperialism, but was perhaps working on the possibility of capturing the Congress through a Left-national leadership. So the question of communists quitting the Congress never came up in those days.

In 1925, Stalin had put forward the idea that in India, the national bourgeoisie had already split into two sections and the compromising section "had already managed, in the main, to come to an agreement with imperialism" and that the task now was to "break this bloc" and "to create a revolutionary anti-imperialist bloc and to ensure the hegemony of the proletariat within this bloc." But the concrete application of this idea to the actual political conditions in India was not worked out by the Communist International in those days.

Anyway, nothing was known about all this to the leadership in India. In those days, the CPI functioned illegally. The Workers' and Peasants' Party functioned as the independent legal platform of the CPI and also as a group or

forum inside the Congress, gathering all the Left trends round the national-revolutionary programme. In 1927 and 1928, discussions began in the International on the basis of the evaluation of the experience of the national-revolutionary movements in the various colonies, especially in India and China, in the post-First World War years, in preparation of the new and detailed colonial thesis, which the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International was to adopt in July-August 1928. But the full text of this colonial thesis of the Sixth World Congress became available to the Indian leadership only after the Meerut arrests.

#### NOT A PERIOD REFORMISM!

Working on its own direct experience, the CPI leadership developed a correct approach towards the national movement, put forward a correct programme for national independence struggle, laid the foundations of the Indian Communist Party and of an independent working-class movement and spearheaded a mass upsurge for its national revolutionary programme. Despite undoubted shortcomings in ideological and organisational work of the Party, the stage was set for further advance along the same lines. But this was interrupted and put out of gear by the Meerut arrests and the policy shift that came in the early thirties.

Thus, this was not a period of prevalence of revisionist or reformist tendency, as was being talked, in the early thirties when the post-Meerut leadership undertook a policy shift in the course of implementing the line of the colonial thesis of the Sixth World Congress of the CI and the draft platform of the CPI worked out on its basis. It was a period when the Party took a correct attitude to the national task which faced it in the pre-independence period—a correct attitude to the national movement. This is exactly why it was able to develop a correct class approach and advance the cause of building the Party and independent proletarian movement and enhance its role

in the national movement. That the policy of correctly uniting with the national-bourgeois leadership and also struggling against it was suitably carried out in those days can be seen from the following little known incident in the jail life of Meerut prisoners, the significance of which was not realised then and also in many succeeding years.

#### MAHATMAJI AND THE MEERUT PRISONERS

Towards the end of 1929, after Gandhiji's unsuccessful meeting with the Viceroy, when he had made up his mind about the Congress adopting the resolution on complete independence and on launching a countrywide struggle for this objective, he personally visited the Meerut Jail and sought an interview with the communist prisoners. The British authorities allowed the interview and Gandhiji and Acharya Kripalani and one other were taken right inside the barrack where the Meerut prisoners were lodged. The interview took place in the presence of the Jail Superintendent.

Addressing the leading comrades who were known to him as young co-workers in the National Congress and in NCO movement of 1920-22, Mahatma said: You have been pressing for the acceptance of the goal of complete national independence and for the launching of a struggle. Now that the Congress will adopt the Independence Resolution and launch a satyagraha struggle, what have you to say—what differences remain between us?

On this Com. Dange asked the Mahatma: If in the course of the coming struggle, because of police repression and provocation, masses retaliate and a few policemen are wounded or killed, will you again withdraw the struggle as you did in 1922 by the Bardoli resolution?

Gandhiji thought for a while and replied: No, he would not do that.

#### DISASTROUS POLICY-SHIFT OF 1930

Not many months had elapsed since this incident, and our Party, in the main, was keeping away from this great

national movement of the thirties, was even opposing it as a reformist movement. The struggle launched by Mahatma Gandhi was not revolutionary; it was anti-imperialist and democratic in content though its technique surely sought to limit mass action. All the same, it set vast masses into motion and infused in them the spirit of national revolution. Our opposition to it not only isolated the Party from the national movement but also led to a split in our mass trade unions which were already facing the combined offensive of victimisation and police repression after the Meerut arrests. We were virtually out of the Congress and tried to form an Anti-Imperialist League as a rival organisation. The central trade-union organisation had two successive splits leaving the rump of a Red TUC in our hands. Our Party itself split, though temporarily.

Our incorrect way of struggling against the national-reformist Gandhian leadership culminated in our attacking Left-nationalist leadership of Nehru and Subhas Bose and the radical groups, which were orientating towards socialism—as “Left manoeuvre of the bourgeoisie.” Anti-communist tendencies began to make their appearance in the national movement. It was a period of a serious setback for the Party and for the working-class organisations.

#### ITS CORRECTION IN 1934-36

The worst of the Left-sectarian mistakes were corrected in 1933-34, with the help of the 3-Parties' Letter (CPGB, CPC and CPG) and the letter of the Chinese Communist Party, after the release of most of the Meerut comrades. The Party was reunited. A political resolution drafted on the basis of the Draft Platform and the two letters and summing this experience formed the basis of this unity. There was a determined campaign for working-class unity and for healing the split in many trade unions.

This led to a resurgence of working-class actions and a strike-wave. Imperialism struck again, banning the Party.

and many of its mass organisations and arresting or detaining a large number of leaders. This correction of sectarian mistakes, though it cleared the air and reunited our forces, was not thoroughgoing enough.

Sectarianism in regard to the national movement was corrected but there was no clarity as to the character of the National Congress and its leadership. While the need for anti-imperialist united front was recognised—the Indian National Congress was not yet recognised as the organ of united national front.

Sharp differences existed inside the Party about work inside the Congress, about the role of the national-bourgeois leadership and about the attitude towards it. They were resolved only after the 7th Congress of the CI (1935) which worked out the policy of united anti-fascist front for the advanced capitalist countries and concretised the anti-imperialist united front for India in terms of participation in the organisation under the Indian National Congress (Com. Dimitrov's report); discussions on the basis of Dimitrov's report and resolutions of the 7th Congress led to the acceptance of the Dutt-Bradley Thesis and then we were able to carry forward the pre-Meerut line, though on a higher plane, with greater experience and with a far larger mass base.

#### THE COLONIAL THESIS OF THE 6TH CONGRESS OF THE CI

Here it is necessary to examine the main features of the elaborate theory of colonial revolution that was worked out in the Colonial Thesis of the Sixth World Congress of the CI and to its application to India. This thesis, entitled *Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies*, was a continuation of the work of creating the theory, strategy and tactics of national-revolutionary movement in dependent countries of Asia and Africa, in the context of the world socialist revolution, a work which was begun by Lenin in the colonial theses of 1920 (2nd Con-

gress of the CI). It was the product of collective thought and work, which sought to generalise the rich experience of ten years of upsurge of national-liberation struggles, which developed after the First World War under the impact of the October Socialist Revolution. The experience of India and China were the most important. A delegation of the Indian Communist Party was not present at the Congress but the Indian experience was probably presented by the delegates of the British Communist Party, who had direct links through British comrades who came to assist us in the pre-Meerut days and from Com. Saklatwala who had toured India in 1927.

The thesis served as a Marxist-Leninist guide to communists and revolutionaries for almost two decades. Though the Seventh Congress of the CI indicated a new policy shift for India, it did not work out a new thesis for the national revolutionary movement in the colonial countries. The general analysis and the principles of 1928 theses were considered to be valid.

It laid down general principles and guiding lines for strategy and tactics; but these had to be concretely applied and integrated with the living experience of the movement and conditions in our country to work out a correct practical policy and slogans.

The document giving us a thorough-going analysis of all the class forces participating in the national-liberation revolution, and unfolding before us the special dynamics of national-democratic revolution, developing in the backward countries like India had a tremendous positive significance for all Marxists.

But it must also be admitted now that it had also negative features and shortcomings, which with the weakness of our ideological work in integrating the principles with concrete realities and experience of our national and people's movement led to serious Left-sectarian tendencies.

## ITS MAIN THESES

Basing itself on Leninist thesis, the document characterised the national-liberation struggle against imperialism as the unfolding of bourgeois-democratic revolution.

It sharply emphasised the "national factor which to a considerable degree determines the special character of the colonial revolution" and which has to be taken into account in considering the tactics of the Communist Party.

It gave a detailed analysis of the classes participating in the national revolution, especially of the role of the national bourgeoisie.

It defined the national-reformist and national-revolutionary tendencies of the bourgeoisie in the national movement and carefully formulated the attitude which the proletarian party had to adopt toward the former in its struggle for hegemony in revolution.

It laid the greatest stress on the building of an independent Communist Party, working-class and peasant organisations and developing the anti-feudal agrarian revolution.

In defining the two deviations, it laid special emphasis on the struggle against bourgeois-reformism as essential for achieving hegemony of the proletariat in the national revolution.

It gave the main features of the programme of national revolution and defined also the slogan of power.

The contribution which the theses made to our understanding of the role of the national bourgeoisie, the attitude to the national movement and of the slogan of power was very important for us. Equally important for us was its emphasis on building and organising the all-India Communist Party and promoting peasant revolutionary movement against feudalism. In the early thirties, our sectarian mistakes on the first three points made the discharge of the other two tasks difficult.

It cannot be said that the sectarian mistakes of the early thirties stemmed from the formulations in the thesis. For the worst sectarian mistakes were corrected later on the basis of the thesis itself. But there were shortcomings in the thesis which could promote Left-sectarian tendencies, especially if we stuck to the letter and did inadequate theoretical and ideological work to solve the concrete problems of our revolution. This is what has happened in the case of our Party.

## LENIN ON THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL BOURGEOISIE

Regarding the role of the national bourgeoisie in the national-liberation revolution, the thesis summated the discussion which began in 1920 at the Second Congress of the CI. So this question is plaguing us even now. It would be worth while to go over the various stages of the analysis, which the Marxist-Leninist science has made of this question.

Lenin, writing about "Democracy and Narodism in China" in 1912 made a formulation on this question which is often quoted now-a-days (e.g., two recent books by Soviet writers on Indian economic development). Lenin wrote:

The Western bourgeoisie is in a state of decay; it is already confronted by its grave-digger—the proletariat. In Asia, in contrast, there is *still* a bourgeoisie capable of championing sincere, militant, consistent democracy, a worthy comrade of France's great enlighteners and great leaders of the close of the eighteenth century. (V. I. Lenin, *The National-liberation Movement in the East*, F.L.P.H., Moscow, 1962, p. 43)

He further added that the "principal social support of this Asian bourgeoisie... is the peasant." He condemned the treachery of the 'liberal bourgeois' leader Yuan Shih-kai and praised the 'platform of Sun Yat-sen' every line of

which reflects the "democratic enthusiasm which is stirring the toiling masses." (*ibid*)

This was before the October Socialist Revolution and the new upsurge of national-revolutionary movements in Asia. In 1920, at the Second Congress of the CI in the colonial commission M. N. Roy put the supplementary thesis making the point that in China and India, where there is more or less a developed bourgeoisie, this class is tending to come to a compromise with imperialism. This point was summed up by Lenin thus:

There has been a certain rapprochement between the bourgeoisie of the exploiting and colonial countries, so that very often—even in most cases, perhaps—where the bourgeoisie of the oppressed countries does support the national movement, it at the same time works hand-in-glove with the imperialist bourgeoisie, that is, joins forces with it against all revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes. (*ibid*, p. 266)

From this, Lenin drew the conclusion: We support bourgeois-liberation movements when their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organising the peasantry and the broad mass of the exploited in a revolutionary spirit.

M. N. Roy later put forward the thesis that the Indian bourgeoisie "prefers to enter into an alliance with the imperialist brother in return for a promise of a change in the political and economic administration of the country" and added that "imperialist capital is not disinclined to ensure such opportunities to the colonial bourgeoisie." (His introduction to the German edition of his *India in Transition*, 1922)

In 1925, Stalin in his well-known address to the University of the Toilers of the East, said that in India the compromising section of the bourgeoisie has already, in the main, come to an agreement with imperialism. It has

formed a bloc with imperialism. Break this bloc; expose the treachery of the compromising bourgeoisie; create a revolutionary anti-imperialist bloc to ensure the hegemony of the proletariat in the same. (See *On the Colonial Question*, PPH)

#### ANALYSIS OF THE 6TH WORLD CONGRESS THESIS

The discussion which took place in the Sixth Congress of the CI was against the background of the betrayal of national revolutionary struggle by Chiang Kai-shek in China, the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement in 1922 by Gandhiji and the subsequent Swarajist trend. What were the conclusions drawn summing this experience?

It did not draw the conclusion that the national bourgeoisie as a whole or its leadership had gone counter-revolutionary—as used to be stated in some of our propaganda material in the early thirties (some articles in the CI magazine in the thirties did the same). It gave a balanced analysis and called for more concrete study in the future. It said:

(1) The position of the colonial bourgeoisie in the bourgeois-democratic revolution is still for the most part an ambiguous one, and its vacillations in accordance with the course of the revolution are even more considerable than in the bourgeoisie of an independent country e.g., the Russian bourgeoisie in 1905-17) [*Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-colonies*, P.P.H., Bombay 1948, p. 24]

(2) The national bourgeoisie (industrial) support the national movement and represent a special vacillating compromising tendency which is defined as national reformism.

(3) In India and Egypt, we still observe for the time being, the typical, bourgeois-national movement—an

opportunist movement, subject to great vacillations, *balancing between imperialism and revolution* (emphasis in the original, *ibid.*, p. 25)

(4) "Independence of the country is to the advantage of the whole colonial people and corresponds also to the interests of the national bourgeoisie." Independent rule, a future of 'free' independent capitalist development, hegemony over an independent people—this imperialism will never voluntarily yield to the national bourgeoisie. "In this respect, the contradiction between the national bourgeoisie of the colonial country and imperialism is objectively of a radical character." (*ibid.*, p. 25)

(5) National bourgeoisie capitulates to imperialism again and again but its capitulation is not final as long as the danger of *class revolution* has not become immediate, acute and menacing. (*ibid.*, p. 26)

Thus we see that these conclusions of the 1928 thesis, rejected M. N. Roy's idea of imperialism "de-colonising" the national bourgeoisie and buying it over. It did not accept Stalin's conclusion that the national bourgeoisie in India as having already split into a compromising and a revolutionary section. It said the whole class was balancing between imperialism and revolution and displaying a compromising tendency but warned that its capitulation does not become final so easily and that contradictions between it and imperialism are of a radical nature.

#### APPLICATION TO INDIA IN THE THIRTIES

The events which took place in India in the two years which followed the formulation of this thesis could have been differently interpreted in terms of this very analysis.

In December 1928, the Calcutta session of the National Congress passed a resolution on dominion status. Nehru Report (1928) demanded dominion status but also virtual transfer of the control of political and economic adminis-

tration to India. In 1929 national leadership negotiated with the Viceroy. When their demands were rejected, they passed the Lahore resolution and decided to launch a nation-wide struggle.

Thus the national bourgeoisie and its leadership was not playing a counter-revolutionary role but after temporising was going ahead to launch a mass anti-imperialist movement.

Then again the thesis had not said keep away from the movement. It had said that the oppositional movement the national bourgeoisie launches, though it *brakes* and *retards* development of the revolutionary movement, has still "real special significance for the development of the revolutionary movement" and that it "can exert a certain *accelerating* influence on the political awakening of the masses." (*ibid.*, p. 33. Emphasis in original)

The 1930 CD movement which began with peaceful satyagraha action soon developed into a mighty anti-imperialist mass upheaval marked by such mass actions as at Peshawar, Sholapur, Chimur-Ashti, etc. Sometime later in a review of the international situation presented before the ECCI it was stated that in the 1930 struggle a situation developed in India which was comparable to the situation in Russia at the time of the first revolution of 1905 and regret was expressed that there was no strong Communist Party to take advantage of the situation.

It is true that the CPI was not very strong at the beginning of 1929 before the Meerut arrests; but later, besides being weakened by repression, it had stultified itself by standing apart from the great national movement.

Without pronouncing a judgement here as to how far the 6th World Congress Thesis itself had a sectarian slant, it can be definitely stated that the directives for its implementation as conceived in the international circles and as carried out here in India were definitely sectarian. It must be further stated that the political line worked out and

reflected in the statements of the Meerut prisoners, who also took the 6th World Congress thesis as their guide, was not so sectarian.

#### SHORTCOMINGS OF THE 6TH CONGRESS THESIS

But it must be recognised now that there were such shortcomings in the thesis—especially in the manner the analysis was presented that it could not but lead to sectarianism and on its basis sectarian tendencies could not be rooted out.

For instance, the Thesis, following Lenin, had correctly emphasised the national factor which determines the special character of the colonial revolution. But this was not enough. It was necessary to drive home that the proletariat and its party have always to be in the forefront of the national struggle against foreign imperialism in all its manifestations, display the greatest self-sacrificing spirit. Only in this way can the working class in these colonies organise itself and move forward towards securing hegemony in the liberation struggle. The proletariat emerges, gets organised and disciplined in the process of capitalist production as it grows and expands. It imbibes class consciousness in the trade-union struggle in the fight to protect its livelihood. But only when it comes forward to fight for democracy then alone can it achieve hegemony in the bourgeois-democratic revolution. This is what Lenin taught us. This was for the proletariat fighting for the bourgeois-democratic revolution in an independent country.

But in a dependent country, where the fight for national independence from foreign imperialism is the central task, the fight for the national objective becomes the fight for democracy. Hence correct identification with this national aspect alone enables the proletariat to discharge its class task of building an independent proletarian movement, secure hegemony in the liberation movement.

In theoretically summing the role of the national bour-

geoisie in the national revolution in colonies, in the light of the new living experience of the revolutionary practice, the thesis gave a cautious and balanced judgement. It was more in the spirit of Lenin's formulations at the Second Congress than like the subsequent formulations of M. N. Roy or J. Stalin.

But there were serious shortcomings on this point in the thesis which could not but lead to a persistent and chronic Left-sectarian trend. The judgement on the role of the national bourgeoisie in the national independence revolution was apparently cautious and balanced, but the whole trend of emphasis throughout the document was definitely tipped in one direction and the wrong direction. National bourgeoisie was said to be "balancing between imperialism and revolution." Its great vacillations and compromising tendencies in the course of the national struggle were rightly stressed. Its final capitulation to imperialism does not take place so easily was also emphasised. But the question is, what is the trend of the national bourgeoisie as the national revolutionary tendency grows, with the growth of the leadership and actions of the working class in close alliance with the vast masses of peasantry? As this revolutionary force—whose main content is effective anti-imperialist anti-feudal actions—and which objectively is not of the nature of a "class revolution" against the bourgeoisie—grows, does the national bourgeoisie necessarily run into the arms of the imperialist oppressors of the nation? The thesis has rightly emphasised the fact that the contradictions between imperialism and the national bourgeoisie fighting for national, political and economic independence, which its class interest demand, are of a radical nature.

The nature of the political and economic exploitation by modern imperialism of dependent countries—especially of industrially developed countries like India and China, is such that, despite retardation of industrialisation and the

artificial propping up of feudalism, there has been a steady growth of new social classes—the national bourgeoisie (industrial), the modern working class and the new peasantry. The growth of the forces of social revolution in India which Marx foretold in the period of the rule of British industrial capital over India—continued all the more in the period of the rule of British finance capital.

With the outbreak of the general crisis of capitalism at the end of the First World War, the contradiction between imperialism and the entire people of the dependent countries of Asia including their national bourgeoisie sharpened tremendously. This gave rise to the unprecedented upsurge of the modern national movement in these countries and these movements were headed by national bourgeois leadership. Under the impact of the October socialist revolution inside these national movements a national revolutionary trend takes shape in which the leading role of the working class and the force of anti-feudal peasant revolution come to the fore. The contradiction between the national bourgeoisie, because of its vacillating and compromising tendency, and the national revolutionary trend, begins to shape and grows.

#### TWO CONTRADICTIONS

Of these two contradictions the first contradiction is the main and basic one, characteristic of the phase of the revolution and has an objective basis in the conflicting interests of the opposing class forces ranged against each other. Imperialism, feudalism and comprador elements *vs* the entire people including the national bourgeoisie. The second contradiction is secondary one; the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal aims which the national revolutionary tendency pursues are objectively in the interest of the national bourgeoisie itself.

As economic and political developments proceed under the impact of the deepening of the general crisis of capi-

talism, the first contradiction sharpens immeasurably, while objective conditions exist to solve or neutralise the second contradiction in the interest of achieving the basic aims of the stage of the revolution.

But in the thesis the picture is so presented as though the second contradiction is growing as fast or even faster than the first one and as though the national bourgeoisie is on the way out of the anti-imperialist united front of the people. The aim of the struggle of the proletariat for achieving hegemony in the national revolution appears to be shown as expulsion of the national bourgeoisie from the front. In the *Two Tactics* Lenin defining the struggle for achieving proletarian hegemony in the democratic revolution defines the task as the stabilisation of the vacillations of the bourgeoisie, its neutralisation. This is not how the matter is presented in the thesis, especially because it considers the vacillations of the colonial bourgeoisie in the course of the revolution even greater than in the case of independent bourgeoisie as in Russia.

The compromises and the betrayals of the national bourgeois leadership in India and China in the late twenties were correctly taken into account as proof of the strong compromising tendency of this class—arising out of their subjective fear of the class forces representing the national revolutionary tendency. But it was also true that as the general crisis of capitalism deepened the first contradiction sharpened immeasurably and it began to become clear that the progressive role of this class in the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution was not played out. Thus this factor and also the national aspect of the revolution had to be taken into consideration by the proletariat in its fight for hegemony.

Thus in the thesis the struggle of the proletariat for the hegemony in the national revolution is not presented as a struggle to build anti-imperialist national front, uniting with the national bourgeoisie while exposing and struggl-

ing against its compromises, developing anti-feudal struggles as part of national revolution, building worker-peasant alliance and thus stabilising the vacillations of the bourgeoisie.

Consequently the character of the national movement, of the National Congress and the attitude towards it could not be correctly formulated on the basis of the thesis and even after the two letters (1933) mentioned above. This was only done on the basis of the decisions of the 7th Congress referred to above.

#### SLOGAN OF POWER

In the thesis the slogan of power put forward in the basic tasks of the national revolution was workers' and peasants' Soviet republic—democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants. But in the context of the national independence revolution in which national bourgeoisie participated and the question of united front with it was vital—the slogan of power had to be the democratic republic and revolutionary national constituent assembly. Even in China where the entire development of the revolution was of a different character and on a higher plane, where workers' and peasants' Soviets had emerged in several liberated districts as a parallel centre of power under proletarian leadership—when the Party took the initiative to forge a united front with the national bourgeois government of Chiang-Kai-Shek in the anti-Japanese war—it correctly put forward the slogan of a democratic republic of a new type and worked out the tactics of unity and struggle with the national bourgeoisie.

Giving expression to our view on the shortcomings of the thesis is not an alibi for our sectarianism in the pre-independence period. In fact we have pointed out how there were warnings and guidance for us in it to enable us to avoid these mistakes. That a certain lop-sidedness and a sectarian slant existed in the document does not

detract from the great significance of these historic theses. It was a first collective effort at constructing a comprehensive theory of national-democratic revolution in colonial and dependent countries. Basing itself on the work of Lenin *On the Two Tactics in the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution* and on the *Colonial Thesis* (1920)—the document had underlined the fact that the national-liberation revolution developing in these countries in the period of world socialist revolution, has novel features, and presents the proletariat in these countries with new tasks and new opportunities. The great merit of the document was that it put before the proletariat of these countries and its party the task of achieving proletarian hegemony in the national revolution; laid the greatest emphasis on building the Communist Party, independent proletarian movement and the peasant revolutionary movement against feudalism. It asked us to bear in mind the national factor and called for a relentless struggle against the compromising tendency of the national bourgeoisie. The theses also pointed out that new possibilities opened before these countries as they would be achieving liberation in a period when socialism has already become victorious in one or more advanced countries. It said that if these countries attained national liberation through a revolution setting up workers' and peasants' Soviets, then they would be able to avoid the stage of capitalist development, be able to go over to socialism through a non-capitalist path, with assistance from advanced socialist countries.

#### SECOND PERIOD OF ADVANCE (1936-41)

These principles gave our Party a radical class approach, made it the builder of a new mass force for the national-liberation movement—the independent workers' and peasants' movement. This, coupled with the impact of the October socialist revolution gave our Party the potential power to rally together all the patriotic and revolutionary

elements in the national movement. But it needed a correct understanding of the national aspect of the liberation struggle, a correct attitude to the national movement and a correct understanding of the role of the national bourgeoisie in the same. Thus only when this correction was fully made in 1936-37 that we entered into the second period of an all-round advance of our Party.

The Party was reunited and organised on an all-India scale, with a central all-India legal paper to co-ordinate and organise its activities. The TUC was reunited (1938) and the trade-union movement expanded and strengthened so that it became capable of political strike action (anti-black bill strike, 1938; anti-war strike, October 1939). In collaboration with Left forces we organised all-India kisan movement. We developed effective contacts with the democratic struggle of the people in princely states. Work inside the National Congress was better organised and expanded. In coordination with Left forces inside the Congress we pressed for unity and all-out struggle for national independence. New forces and cadres from revolutionary groups and the Socialist Party joined the Party. The Party grew into a significant factor in the national movement with an independent organised mass base.

There were, of course, serious weaknesses and shortcomings in the work of the Party in this period. It was a period of maturing and steeling the Party for great battles which were in the offing. With the emergence of fascism and the drive towards war, a period had opened when the Party had to address itself to the task of preparing the ideological and political groundwork of our national-democratic revolution the basis of a concrete study of its peculiarities and special problems facing the national movement. The Party had to be strengthened politically and organisationally as a militant body capable of combining legal and illegal work. Special stress had to be given on developing anti-landlord peasant struggles, anti-feudal struggles

in princely states, struggles against social backwardness of sections of rural poor. But our forces proved inadequate for the purpose. That is why again serious mistakes occurred in the succeeding period and we were not able to play an effective role in the final stages of the national independence struggle.

#### CHARACTER OF THE MISTAKE OF 1942

We are not going through a self-critical review of the pre-independence period. But it is necessary to refer to the serious mistakes of 1942 period. It is usual to refer to this period as one of Right-opportunist mistakes because of serious mistakes on the question of Pakistan and the Muslim League and because of the anti-strike and anti-peasants' struggle stand we took. However, the main mistake out of which these Right-opportunist mistakes followed, was one of our wrong attitude to the national struggle of 1942.

Though we had corrected our attitude to the national movement and our stand on the role of the national bourgeoisie and the national leadership, we had not created the theoretical foundations for that policy by making a concrete study of the emergence and the development of the national bourgeoisie and the growth of the policy of the Congress leadership. Sectarian attitudes continued; united front with the national bourgeois leadership was considered a manoeuvre, and the conception of the national bourgeois leadership inevitably going in for a compromise with imperialism as the Left forces grew also continued among the cadres. It was not fully realised that as crisis deepened the contradictions between the national bourgeoisie and imperialism were sharpening, national bourgeoisie including its topmost sections were now all supporting the Congress, as national political and economic independence was in their interest.

The Congress leadership was from 1936 onwards taking

advanced positions. The Lahore resolution was followed by the Karachi resolution and later by the appointment by the Congress of the National Planning Commission which later put out a blueprint of a plan for economic independence—an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal programme of the bourgeoisie. It adopted an international policy of opposing war and fascism, of supporting the Russian and Chinese revolutions and the anti-colonial and anti-fascist struggles of Abyssinia and Spain.

This was accompanied by compromising stand as far as actual struggle is concerned—attitude of hostility towards the trade-union and peasants' struggles and organisations, opposition to struggle against autocracy of the princely states. On this basis the policy of uniting with the national movement while struggling against the compromising policy of the leadership had to be strictly followed. The Party had to be equipped with a theoretical and ideological groundwork based on study of these concrete problems in order to enable the Party correctly wield the tactic of unity and struggle vis-a-vis the national-bourgeois leadership in the context of the twists and turns that were coming.

In 1940-41 our Party's stand about the turn of the imperialist war into an anti-fascist people's war was correct. The perspective of national struggle had temporarily changed. The position became clearer when the country was faced with Japanese invasion and the British government released the Congress leaders first. How to defend the country and the people from the invaders while the British enslaved us? That was the question which faced the nation. Only a free people could defend the country against the fascist invaders.

If the British imperialists agreed to a virtual transfer of power and conceded a national government—to India—to the National Congress then alone India would be able to take her place in worldwide anti-fascist front in which

the Soviet Union was also there. This was the stand of the National Congress and this was also our slogan. What was the difference as we thought then? Proletarian internationalism demanded that genuine anti-fascists should lend their support to the war unconditionally; while bourgeois nationalism made its support to the anti-fascist war strictly conditional. In the early months of 1942 we argued with the national leadership to declare unconditional support to the anti-fascist war and demand national government. Later we asked them to forge united front with the Muslim League, declare support to anti-fascist war and demand national government. Imperialists were using the communalist opposition of the League to the Congress to reject the demand for national government.

#### EVALUATION OF THE '42 PERIOD

Was the conditional stand of the national leadership due to their pro-fascist stand? It was in the main anti-fascist and anti-imperialist and not pro-fascist. Their stand logically led to "Quit India" struggle when imperialism rejected the demand for national government. Ostensibly the aim of the struggle was to bring pressure on British government to concede the national demand. There was, of course, the possibility of the struggle developing into sabotage which would open the door to Japanese invasion, and the leadership did give free rein to such developments mainly as a pressure on the British government.

From our "unconditional" stand we came to oppose the resolution for "Quit India" struggle and put in our point of view in the form of an amendment. When, before the struggle started there was a mass arrest of national leaders and protest strikes and hartals broke out, we kept away from them. We pleaded that the struggle would not bring pressure on the government but would lead to pro-fascist sabotage and fifth-column activities which would be used by the imperialists as an excuse for repression and denial

of the national demand. We campaigned for national unity for national government and defence and for the release of national leaders.

As invasion danger increased and the struggle developed we stood completely isolated from it. But despite the hostile atmosphere our Party stood together, campaigned with conviction, took advantage of the legality to build the movement for national unity and defence of the people. The logic of our stand led to Rightist mistakes like support to Pakistan, rigid anti-strike and anti-peasant struggle stand. Despite certain achievements of the period this stand did serious damage to the Party by isolating us for a time from the rest of anti-imperialist elements in the national movement and also split our mass base.

It is generally agreed that our stand in those days did damage to the Party. It is agreed that our slogan of "People's War", our campaign against fifth column, our rigid anti-strike attitude—our stand on Pakistan—were all serious errors. But the question whether our negative attitude to "Quit India" struggle, our non-participation in it were right or not, that has not been settled.

#### CRUCIAL QUESTION OF ATTITUDE TO '42 STRUGGLE

It is absolutely necessary to come to a judgement on this question. Our attitude of keeping away from the movement was both theoretically and tactically wrong. Was the neutralist and conditional stand of the national leadership—pro-fascist and opportunist? Or was it basically anti-fascist and anti-imperialist? We have to admit that it was the latter. There was a whole background for it. We even defended the leadership as anti-fascist but stated that their struggle was leading to dangerous consequences, to facilitating invasion. We were right in declaring our general support to anti-fascist war. We were also right when we said the country has to be defended against Japanese invaders.

But could the Communist Party defend the country without the national movement? Was it realistic to imagine that in the face of invasion the people would rally round the anti-fascist and patriotic CPI, turning its back on the national leadership as having turned pro-fascist? Both these propositions are unrealistic. The only path of preventing worst sabotage and developing real militant anti-fascist and anti-imperialist movement in peasant areas—which would really stand up to the invader—was the path of being with the national movement and not of opposing it. *Our wrong stand vis-a-vis this turn in the national movement arose from our dogmatic understanding of proletarian internationalism and sectarian attitude towards the national movement.*

It is idle to speculate as to what would have happened, if we could have avoided our isolation from the national movement in its worst form and also avoided the other Rightist mistakes about Pakistan, etc. But this much we can safely say that we would have got the support of a vast mass of anti-imperialist militant elements in the national movement and our own mass bases would not have been so much damaged. This would have enabled our Party to play a far more effective role in the post-war upsurge, given it a far greater anti-imperialist, anti-feudal sweep. Though this may not have been sufficient to avert the partition and its disastrous aftermath, we would have been in much stronger position in the period after the transfer of power to play our role in smashing the imperialist conspiracy to reduce political independence to naught.

We apologise for having entered into this very lengthy digression, cursorily reviewing the pre-independence Party history. Our only purpose was to show that the author's formula that we have always been fighting a revisionist deviation by a Left-sectarian one and that we always lacked the true Marxist-Leninist—class approach—is quite inadequate to explain the main features of our pre-inde-

pendence Party history. We tried to show that only in the context of a correct understanding of the democratic (i.e. national in the progressive sense) nature of the task which faced us in this stage of the revolution, could we work out the correct Marxist-Leninist policy of building the national front and striving for proletarian hegemony in the same—and thus fight both the deviations.

We further tried to show that historically, there were shortcomings in such a correct understanding, which affected our work and growth in the pre-independence days and that those shortcomings were not liquidated because we failed to make a thorough study of the concrete problems of our revolution in the light of our experience and the general Leninist theory of national and colonial revolution, and by creating the theoretical and ideological groundwork for charting the specific political and tactical line of our national revolution. This has to be borne in mind in reviewing our post-independence policy shifts and Party history. The author's methodology of mechanically and equally fighting both the deviations and of restoring the class approach in that context proves inadequate and leads to wrong results just because this historical background is missed and ignored.