

INDIAN WORKERS PROTEST INFLATION

NEW DELHI -- More than 100,000 demonstrators, carrying red banners, marched to the Parliament House on September 13 to protest against anti-people policies of the Nehru Government. Demonstrators drawn from all parts of the country carried placards with such slogans as "Nationalise Banks," "Nationalise Oil Companies," "Nationalise Foreign Trade," "Increase Dearness Allowance 25 Per Cent," "Down With Corruption," "Change Anti-People Tax Policy," "Scrap Compulsory Deposit Scheme," etc.

The "great march," first of its kind since India achieved independence, was organized by the Communist party of India [CPI]. It proved a success far beyond the expectations of the organizers themselves. On behalf of the marchers, the Communist MP's presented a "great petition" to the Speaker of the House of the People signed by more than 10,000,000 citizens protesting against rising prices and demanding immediate relief. A Praja Socialist MP quipped in the House: "Since when one-time revolutionaries have become petitioners?"

Slogans were deliberately designed to conform to the present CPI line of critical support to the Nehru regime and to avoid any direct criticism of Nehru's basic policies. But it was obvious that the "great march" was undertaken by the CPI's national chairman, S.A. Dange, a staunch Khrushchevite, under pressure from left-wing and centrist currents within the party. The success of the demonstration must be attributed to the growing popular discontent against the bourgeois regime which has cleverly exploited the Sino-Indian border dispute to heap an unbearable tax burden on the workers and peasants.

The military expenditure has been doubled, taxes on fixed income groups have been raised 200 to 300 per cent and all wage earners are being forced to forego 5 to 10 per cent of their meagre incomes under a scheme called "Compulsory Deposit Scheme." Prices of essential commodities have shot up 25 to 50 per cent during the last one year. There have been country-wide strikes

and demonstrations against the tax policy of the Government.

There was in fact a spectacular general strike of nearly 1,000,000 industrial workers and office employees in Lombay City on August 20, initially sponsored by the Socialist party but later supported by other opposition parties. The CPI-controlled All-India Trade Union Congress equivocated at first but supported the strike at the last moment when it was obvious that it was going to be a tremendous success. But the Congress Government in the State ruthlessly suppressed the strike by resorting to mass arrests of leaders and recruiting of blacklegs [scabs] to run the transport and municipal services.

In accordance with its policy of critical support to Nehru, the CPI has held aloof from mass action against the Government, thus helping the extreme rightists to channelise popular discontent along reactionary lines. When the various opposition parties in Parliament brought a non-confidence motion against the Nehru regime, the CPI group remained neutral during voting.

Prime Minister Nehru recently reshuffled his Central Cabinet, ostensibly as a move to permit some of his senior colleagues to take up responsible party posts. In effect this led to the exclusion of certain unpopular rightist figures like Finance Minister Desai and Food Minister Patil from the Union Government. The Cabinet reshuffle came in the wake of mass demonstrations against a Government decision to undertake joint air exercises with the American and British forces and set up a "Voice of America" transmission station in Calcutta. An agreement to this effect is being revised now and might even be scrapped.

In the circumstances the cabinet reshuffle looked like a leftward shift. Actually the Nehru regime has moved very close to Washington since the Sino-Indian border war.

The Soviet press hailed the reshuffle as a triumph for "progressive forces" and a rout of the reactionaries. The Khrushchev bureaucracy has offered massive economic and even military aid to India, including building a new steel plant turned down by America and financed by the Fourth Five Year Plan to the tune of Rs. 500 crores [₹1,000,000,000]. The Dangeite leadership naturally harps on the same tune and even claims that it was responsible for the dismissal of the rightist Ministers from the Cabinet, a fact which is hotly denied by Nehru himself.

In the face of growing mass discontent, India's new Finance Minister Krishnamachari has announced some minor concessions in the tax policy and also relaxation of an omnibus Gold Control Order banning the use of gold above 14-carat purity, which has

rendered jobless more than 2,000,000 goldsmiths all over the country. There is also a move to pay higher dearness allowances to public servants.

All this helps the CPI to foster illusions about the Nehru regime and its progressive character. Also in view of the failure of the left wing within the CPI to put forward an alternative line of militant action, the Dange leadership appears to have emerged considerably stronger after a period of prolonged faction struggle. A leftist faction in the West Bengal unit of the CPI has been defeated in its move to split the party on the basis of the present Sino-Soviet ideological controversy. The centrist tendency led by Kerala's E.M.S. Namboodiripad (former general secretary now undergoing medical treatment in Moscow) has opposed the leftist move to split the party. This has given a decisive majority to the Dange faction within the leadership in the present internal struggle.

Although Dange toes the general line of the Khrushchev bureaucracy in the polemics against the Chinese CP, he is shrewd enough to understand that an image of complete subservience to Moscow would undermine his own position in the eyes of the Indian masses. Of late he has been more vocal in his support to the Togliatti line of "polycentrism" in the world Communist movement.

At a recent workers' rally in Bombay, he said, "We shall not be dictated to either by the Soviet party or by the Chinese party; we shall pursue our own line in relation to our country and if we find we are wrong we shall correct ourselves."

Addressing the "great march" in New Delhi on September 13, he said, "If we do not get our demands by peaceful means we shall use force."

This might sound demagogic but it also reflects the relationship of forces within the CPI. In face of the witch-hunt by the right reactionaries there is a tendency among the party ranks to close ranks. Also the CPI made a demonstrative move by publishing all the documents in connection with the Sino-Soviet controversy, including all the Chinese documents. A serious discussion has been initiated. This is indeed a healthy sign.

Another significant development is that most of the CP leaders arrested for their alleged pro-China views last November have been released in all States except Bengal and Maharashtra. Some leaders of the Revolutionary Communist party(1) in Bengal and a few Socialist trade unionists in Bombay are still detained.

(1) Kanai Pal, an RCP member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, is still under detention. He is a Trotskyist.