

THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA

1920 - 1925

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3<sup>rd</sup> RATE THESIS

## P R E F A C E

A basic assumption of Marxist and other historians of the Communist movement has been that Lenin's colonial theses presented at the Second Congress of the Communist International already contained a theory of colonial revolution - though in a rudimentary form. Later day discussions were geared towards extracting its theoretical propositions (guidelines) and, in their light, formulating strategy and tactics for revolutions in the colonies.

Our discussion in the main will show that all the later International Congresses and debates on the eastern question continually moved within this domain. We, on the other hand, have emphasized that at the Second Congress Lenin was not confronted by the theoretical problems of the colonial revolutions or their solution.

We have shown how, for Lenin, the colonial question was a part of his perspective of an imminent world revolution and thereby a purely conjunctural problem. Any formulations regarding revolutions in the colonies were made tentatively and always with a rider; this needs greater study and detailed analysis.

It was H. N. Roy who first introduced the perspective of revolution in the colonies at the theoretical level; that is posing the theoretical problems presented by the

socio-economic formations and class relationships within the framework of the colony.) Considering there were no Communist parties in the colonial countries, which could act as instruments for revolution, he asked: "How could then the Communist International develop the national liberation movement there as part of the world proletarian revolution?"<sup>1</sup>

Lenin's answer, given his perspective of an impending world revolution, could only be a conjunctural one: "The Communist International must enter into temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in colonial and backward countries, but must not merge with it...."<sup>2</sup>

An even more striking example bringing out the conjunctural aspect in Lenin's thought was the discussion of Roy's question regarding the future perspective of the national revolutions in the colonial and backward countries. Lenin in his report to the plenary session explained: "There was quite a lively debate on this question in the Commission, ...The question was posed as follows: are we to consider as correct the assertion that the capitalist stage of economic development is inevitable for backward nations now on the road to emancipation and among whom a certain advance towards progress is to be seen since the war? We replied in the negative. If the victorious revolutionary proletariat conducts

1 Adhikari, op. cit., vol. I, p. 153. ?

2 Lenin's Preliminary Draft Theses, A.C.H., JNU.

In question & answer: in answer: fact & question implicitly affirmed.

systematic propoganda among them, and the Soviet governments come to their aid with all the means at their disposal - in that event it will be mistaken to assume that the backward peoples must inevitably go through the capitalist stage of development.<sup>3</sup>

If the victorious proletariat and the Soviet governments come to their aid - in that event only could Lenin categorically answer Roy's queries regarding colonial revolutions. And the answer was an integral part of his perspective and theory of world revolution. The need for a theory of the colonial revolution, separate and apart from the world revolution, would emerge only after the latter had failed to materialize.

Any attempt to historically embalm Lenin's propositions derived from his understanding of the conjuncture, into theoretical guidelines for revolutions in the colonies, is utterly misleading.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Second Congress of the Third International Documents.  
A.C.H., JIU.

4 Adhikari's assertion that "Lenin is here probing to work out the guidelines for the Communist vanguard to develop national revolution and to achieve proletarian hegemony in the same" falls within this category. See Adhikari, op. cit., vol. I, p. 163.

## CHAPTER I

### THE ROY-LENIN DEBATE AND THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS - PERSPECTIVES

The very first conceptualization of a theoretical framework of revolution in the colonial countries occurred at the Second Congress of the Third International. The well-known discussion between Lenin and Roy at this Congress has not received the attention adequate to grasp their essential differences. Writing on this subject has tended to remain in the sphere of describing their different assessments of the Indian situation, making no effort to explore the roots of their understanding.<sup>1</sup>

What was the objective reality with which these two individuals felt confronted? And what were their subjective experiences which resulted in their acquiring different positions in the midst of their total perspectives at that particular moment of history?

The failure to make a conceptual analysis rather than noting apparent disagreement has led Halthcox to declare that

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1 John P. Halthcox, "The Roy-Lenin Debate on Colonial Policy: A New Interpretation", Journal of Asian Studies, vol. XXIII, p. 93. Also "Communism and Indian Nationalism" Shastitko, Soviet Land, no. 5, March 1969, "How Lenin Evaluated Indian Liberation Movement" (P.C.J. Archives, JNU). P.C. Joshi, "Lenin and National Revolution", Centenary Commemorative Seminar, Indian Council of World Affairs, 1970. G.S. Adhikari, Documents of the History of the CPI, vols. I and II.

"Disagreement over the degree of support to be given to nationalist leaders has continued to plague the international communist movement to the present day."<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, Halthcox has posed the problem exactly as Roy was later charged of doing. In a paper presented at the Lenin Centenary Seminar by P.C. Joshi, it was held that Roy had "erroneously counterposed the socialist movement of capitalist countries to the national movement of colonial countries. Lenin, while noting the differences saw them as interrelated, inter-dependent and worked for their alliance".<sup>3</sup>

Here one must ask, what is the criteria for judging Roy's error? The fact that Lenin believed and advised that the two should not be contraposed? In what context could they be seen as interrelated and inter-dependent, and at what historical juncture would an alliance between them be desirable and possible? The same paper goes on to say: "Roy lumped Indian capitalism with British imperialism, Lenin differed. Roy was infantile enough to multiply enemies, Lenin was wise enough to isolate the main enemy."<sup>4</sup> But what is not answered is the question, the main enemy in which battle, at which point of the war? If the issue is the capture of power by the Communist Party within the national framework, then what is the role of

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2 Halthcox, op. cit., p. 18.

3 P.C. Joshi, op. cit.

4 Ibid.

that nation's bourgeoisie? If however it is the question of the socialist movement waging a world struggle against an identifiable enemy i.e. imperialism, then can embryonic and constricted capitalisms which lead bourgeois-national movements and rouse patriotic sentiments in their people be allied with against gigantic, octopus like capitalisms whose highest stage is reached in imperialism? That is, can the intra-rivalries of world capitalism, the contradictions between aggressive and repressed capitalisms be effectively utilised to further the socialist objective? X

The answer to such questions can only be validated by theory and revolutionary practice together. But what is most significant is the fact that such questions can only be posed at a particular historical juncture and only when world revolution is on the agenda. And this leads us directly into a search of the Leninist perspective for those features which differentiated it from Roy's. One cannot, like the Soviet scholar Shastitko, reduce the analysis to the claim that "the essence of contradiction between Lenin and Roy, lay in the strategy and tactics of Communists on the national and colonial questions".<sup>5</sup>

X Ultimately the Lenin-Roy debate is reduced to the basically different premises which guided the development of their respective thought and led to the evolution of their

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5 Shastitko, op. cit.



different perspectives. The conception of "supporting existing nationalist movements" was determined within the contours of these perspectives and not outside of them.

✓ To use the word 'perspective' in the Lukacsian sense, perspective is of overriding importance. It determines the course and content, it draws together all the threads, it <sup>wood or</sup> enables the choice between the important and the superficial, <sup>often?</sup> the crucial and the episodic. Though Lukacs' context is literary thought and its expression, it is equally true of the thought of the revolutionary. Each revolutionary's perspective though a function of individual personality, is conditioned by the relationship in which he stands toward his social environment, "part of the life of his time; part of a larger social and historical whole".<sup>6</sup> The revolutionary's perspective thus is essentially shaped in relation to the dominant goals and values of his original premises, as the culmination of his revolutionary experience and past, continuously projected into the future. And it is in this sense that we speak of Lenin's or Roy's perspective.

For Lenin, as for Marx and Engels, the socialist revolution was essentially a world revolution, even if it was not possible for the working class to take power simultaneously in every country or even in several countries at

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6 Georgy Lukacs, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (London: Merlin Press, 1962).

once.<sup>7</sup> (thus before the War of 1914, Lenin had worked out the essential elements of his strategic schema of the world revolution, in which the Russian revolution constituted the prelude and the link between the socialist revolution in the West and the bourgeois-democratic revolution in the East.<sup>8</sup> The national movements of the thus far 'unhistoric' nations were no longer only implicitly progressive, now they were forced into the context of world imperialism.)

(But, world revolution presupposed that the revolution must begin at least from one national state to be followed by a series of revolutions throughout Europe.) The revolution within national confines was determined by internal contradictions produced by the peculiarities of capitalistic development in that particular country as an inseparable part of world capitalism. Because of these peculiarities the organised strength and development of the Russian working class vis-a-vis the weaknesses of its bourgeoisie in comparison to the European working class, placed the question of capturing power by the Russian proletariat on the order of the day.

Thus, the Bolshevik theory from the beginning was confronted by the task of evolving strategy and tactics of

7 For a complete interpretation see Fernando Claudin "The Communist Movement ; From Comintern to Cominform", pp. 46-102.

8 Ibid., p. 51.

capturing power first within the national state and then extending and linking it to the broader perspective of world revolution.

Russia being an extremely backward country compared to Europe, which had not yet completed its bourgeois-democratic revolution resulted in a proletarian movement which was the movement of a minority class. The analysis of this specific combination of factors in Russia led the Bolsheviks to base their strategy and tactics on the following premises i.e. finished theoretical positions: (1) The immediate tasks of the coming revolution were bourgeois-democratic, led and fulfilled by the proletariat because of the incapacity of the bourgeoisie to fulfil its own tasks. (2) The working-class could capture power only if it was able to build a firm alliance with the peasantry against feudalism in order to complete its bourgeois-agrarian tasks. (3) Though the peasantry was seen as the movement of another class capable of turning hostile to the working class with the completion of the agrarian revolution, yet the alliance would serve the purpose of putting the working-class into power which would then be sustained by the victorious working class of advanced capitalist countries.

Thus it becomes clear that the very content and form of alliance within the national confines of Russia was determined by the expected success of the revolution in Europe. With the successful capture of power by the

Bolsheviks in Russia, that is with the achievement of the minimum programme for world revolution (what Lenin called 'revolution in the narrow sense') not only did the correctness of their theoretical positions seem vindicated but also generated great urgency and determination to completely fulfil its ultimate aim of achieving world revolution. In a speech delivered at the end of March 1919, Lenin said: "All over the world the association of Communists is growing. In a number of countries Soviet power has already triumphed. Soon we shall see the victory of Communism throughout the world; we shall see the foundation of the World Federative Republic of Soviets."<sup>9</sup>

A year and a half later, when the Second Congress of the Third International met, reality had not lived up to expectations. Yet the mood of optimism reigned<sup>10</sup> for one of the Congress resolutions said: "The decisive hour is approaching. In practically every country where there is a substantial

<sup>9</sup> Lenin, Collected Works (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), vol. 29, p. 241.

<sup>10</sup> That the actual state of affairs was seen as a momentary interruption in the expected process of the world revolution is manifest in Trotsky's formulation in the principal report he presented to the Third World Congress as late as June 1921, The World Economic Crisis and the New Tasks of Comintern: "Only now do we see and feel that we are not immediately close to our final aim to the conquest of power on the world scale, to the world revolution. We told ourselves back in 1919 that it was a question of months, but now we say that it is perhaps a question of several years...but we know that the development is proceeding in that direction. And that during this period we have become much stronger throughout the world." Quoted by Branko Lazitch, Lenine et la IIIe Internationale (La Baconniere Nustiatel, 1951).  
 (Claudin, op. cit.)

labour movement the working class arms in hand, is faced by a series of bitter struggles."<sup>11</sup>

◇ So the historic moment at which Lenin stood in 1920 in the midst of expectations of an imminent world revolution, was qualitatively different from where he stood in 1905. In 1920 he stood at the head of "an advancing world revolution" in which the national liberation movements were also opposing the main enemy of the Revolution that is imperialism. The momentum of the revolution looking towards its immediate completion sought to unite all the threads of anti-imperialist forces. The necessity to unite all the existing anti-imperialist tendencies however, in that specific situation by no means implied that all these tendencies were of equal weight. On the contrary, in Lenin's thought, every situation contains a central problem the solution of which determines both the answer to the other questions raised simultaneously by it and the key to the further development of all tendencies in the future. Reporting to the Commission on the national and colonial questions apropos the theses presented by Lenin and Roy, Lenin emphasised: "First, what is the cardinal idea

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\* 11 The 'theses on tactics' voted by the 3rd Congress declare that 'the world revolution...will require a fairly long period of revolutionary struggle...but what may be expected is not the waning of the star of the world revolution, not the ebb of its waves, but on the contrary, the aggravation of social antagonisms and social struggles, and the transition to open war.' Decisions of the 3rd Congress of the Communist International, C. B., London, p. 4 (quoted in Claudin).

underlying our theses? (It is the distinction between oppressed and the oppressor nations.... This idea of distinction, of dividing the nations into oppressor and oppressed, runs through the theses... the latter (Koy's colonial theses) were framed chiefly from the standpoint of the situation in India and other big Asian countries oppressed by Britain. Herein lies their great importance to us. The second basic idea in our theses is that, in the present world situation following the imperialist war, reciprocal relations between peoples and the world political system as a whole are determined by the struggle waged by a small group of imperialist nations against the soviet movement and the soviet states headed by soviet Russia. Unless we bear that in mind, we shall not be able to pose a single national or colonial problem correctly.... The Communist parties, in civilized and backward countries alike, can pose and solve political problems correctly only if they make this postulate their starting point.<sup>12</sup>)

✓ The whole draft of Lenin's national and colonial thesis is pregnant with this theoretical premise that the basic contradiction of the epoch was between the struggle of socialist movements against imperialism. And it was this and this alone which led Lenin into posing the entire development in the world as determined by the struggle of the imperialist states against Soviet Russia. It was not the remotest concern for the particular interests of Russia, but

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12 Lenin, collected works, vol. 31, p. 241.

the overriding interests of the world socialist revolution which led to this categorical injunction.

Marx's vision of the socialist revolution was translated into reality by Lenin's creation of an instrument for its realisation - the Bolshevik Party.<sup>13</sup> The victory of the October Revolution and the 'swamp' of chauvinistic nationalism into which the Second International descended led to the foundation of the Third International which sought to bring together all the Communist parties of the world in order to form the general staff of the world revolution.<sup>14</sup>

✓ Roy's participation in the Third International enabled him to appropriate the experience of the Russian revolution i.e. the necessity of building a Communist Party in each national state. But the acceptance and realisation of building a party does not mean that one has grasped beforehand the problems which are actually confronted in its building. The difference between a living experience and an appropriated experience gleaned from historical events of the past lies in the fact that one is absorbed in one's perspective while passing through innumerable ideological struggles, solving

13 Haitheox, op. cit. He compares Roy's "fervent faith in the class consciousness of the proletariat" to Karl Marx's eager optimism before 1848. p. 16.

14 Lenin, "Concluding speech at Closing Session", The Victory of the proletarian revolution on a world scale is assured. The founding of an International Soviet Republic is on the way.

strategical and tactical problems first theoretically and then testing their validity in actual practice. Thus, modifying or sharpening one's reformulations. On the other hand appropriated experience though it adds to your perspective, extends and enlightens it, its organic inseparability remains distinct in the mode of thought of a particular individual. Unless, this appropriated experience passes through the high temperature of the revolutionary furnace of a particular society and gets recreated in a specific historical form determined by the peculiarities of that society.

Thus, in Lenin's vision the dimension of the need for a revolutionary party appears as a living experience linking past and future, marching after the victory of one citadel to attack the other, with the fervent hope of an assured victory for the confidently marching forces. Unlike the vision of Roy where this dimension is yet to emerge at the centre of one's own national citadel, while the victory of this citadel and consequently the march beyond that remains a possibility of the future.

— Though both Lenin and Roy owed allegiance to the concept of world revolution in their respective perspectives this is the crucial difference. Because of this difference Lenin did not share Roy's confidence in the strength of the Indian proletariat and peasantry till long years of conscious intervention strengthened their role in the balance of inner



social forces.<sup>15</sup> While Roy's faith in Lenin's vision and in the strength of his armies marching ahead to destroy world capitalism remained always purely a formal one.

In a post facto analysis of the dissolution of the Third International, Roy refuses to accept the inseparability of the Russian Revolution from the world revolution. He writes: "The contradiction was that the organization [i.e. CI] as a whole tried to live simultaneously in two periods of history - pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary. The Russian Communist Party constituting its leadership lived in the post-revolutionary period, whereas the rest of the organization lived in the pre-revolutionary period. Nevertheless, the entire organization was to function as a homogeneous body, with a uniform organizational structure, a centralised policy and according to resolutions equally binding for all."<sup>16</sup>

It was precisely in this manner that he interpreted Lenin's position during the Second Congress in which he identified himself with the pre-revolutionary period and Lenin with the post-revolutionary period, and thus failed to discern

<sup>15</sup> Faithcox, op. cit., p. 15. The differences between Lenin and Roy are reduced to different analyses of class forces in India.

<sup>16</sup> H.N. Roy, The Communist International (Radical Democratic Party Publication, 1943), p. 43.

the centrality of Lenin's perspective - that is the "actuality of world revolution".

Roy had theoretically accepted Lenin's experience in Russian apropos the role and character of the bourgeoisie, and sought to apply the same to India. About the Russian bourgeoisie Lenin said; "That the bourgeoisie is inconsistent, self-cooking, and cowardly in its support of the revolution. The bourgeoisie in the mass, will inevitably turn towards counter-revolution, towards the autocracy, against the revolution, and against the people, as soon as its narrow, selfish interests are not..."

Also, Roy felt, it was amply confirmed by the course of the Indian national movement which retreated from a purely bourgeois-democratic programme or rather even failed to present all its essential elements, chiefly an agrarian programme.

When the Indian national problem was viewed in the context of basic premises of revolution, the questions and answers followed logically. The existing social structure, i.e. the colonial structure had to be overthrown in the interest of national development. And for the solution of the problem presented by history, that of imperialism along with its maintenance of pre-capitalist modes and forms of exploitation which stood as the chief obstacles to a

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17 Lenin, Alliance of the Working Class and the Peasantry (Collection of articles and speeches), p. 102. From Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution.

bourgeois-democratic revolution. The next step was to discover the existence of a new class capable of taking the lead in bringing about the change. India had witnessed the simultaneous development of two new classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The question that followed was, what was the relative strength and organization of these two classes? Lenin had concluded that the Russian bourgeoisie would inevitably turn to counter-revolution as soon as its narrow, selfish interests were met. Roy appropriated this conclusion and analysed the role of the Indian bourgeoisie in terms of betrayal and counter-revolution and theorised that the proletariat alone was capable of leading the anti-imperialist struggle successfully. Right or wrong within the national framework this was the class-position he advocated. So all energies should be devoted towards building a proletarian party.<sup>18</sup> And part of this work would be to tear open the hollowness of the bourgeois programme and undefined promises. Would this be in contradiction to the anti-imperialist movement? Or would identification of class interests and the struggle against imperialism give the movement the widest base and heightened militancy? It could temporarily weaken the existing movement, but would it not eventually lead to a more total and sweeping struggle? These could be the revolutionary's questions once you eliminate the urgency of

18 Roy's original Draft of Supplementary Theses presented at the Second Congress of the Third International. Thesis No. 10 (reproduced in G. Adhikari, p. 136).

national liberation movements playing a part in an immediate confrontation with imperialism.

By formally accepting Lenin's vision of world revolution on one hand, Roy <sup>committed</sup> committed himself to the position of compulsorily "supporting the national bourgeoisie" while on the other hand when he was faced with the task of evolving strategy and tactics for a national revolution i.e. the Indian revolution, Roy was led into opposing the national bourgeoisie as a hostile and 'reactionary force'. This generated for him the eternal dilemma of supporting the national bourgeoisie and at the same time building an effective Communist Party.<sup>19</sup> It is this dilemma which Haithcox highlights. Haithcox however imbues it with the character of a theoretical dichotomy - to which Lenin provided no answer, instead of seeing it as the original paradox which resulted from Roy transferring Lenin's problematic position into a theoretical principle.

Interpreting Lenin's national and colonial theses, Adhikari draws the conclusion that "Lenin's preliminary draft theses already contained the essential guidelines for developing a harmoniously integrated theory, strategy and tactics of national democratic revolution in colonies and

<sup>19</sup> Haithcox, op. cit. quotes from G. Adhikari's critique of E.M.S. Namboodripad's document 'Revisionism and Dogmatism in the CPI' that 'the roots of the present dispute between the Right CPI and the Left CPI lie in the perennial controversy over the "role of the national bourgeoisie in our country, and in our national democratic revolution in its various phases." p.-19.

backward countries."<sup>20</sup>

According to Adhikari, Lenin in correcting Roy's e-  
 , sectarianism, further concretised and clarified these guide-  
 lines. Discussing the significance of the Soviet idea formu-  
 lated by Lenin in his thesis, Adhikari writes that Lenin put  
 it forward "as a key link which has to be grasped if the  
 Communist vanguard has to succeed in consolidating its leader-  
 ship in the national revolution and open the path for non-  
 capitalist development."<sup>21</sup> He goes on to ask "what are

Soviets?" and answers "...Soviets are an alliance of revolu-  
 tionary classes - a united front mass organization of struggle  
 which develops into organs of power. Lenin here is probing  
to work out the guidelines for the communist vanguard to  
develop national revolution and to achieve proletarian  
hegemony in the same."<sup>22</sup>

These guidelines according to Adhikari could have  
 been adopted by the Communists of colonial countries. This  
 adaptation "has first and foremost to support the national  
liberation struggle, while fighting the bourgeois-democratic  
compromising tendency on the one hand and preserving and  
strengthening the independence of the Communist party...."<sup>23</sup>

But the question is, are there any such guidelines  
 or 'directives' in Lenin's colonial theses for the 'national

20 G. Adhikari, vol. I, p. 169.

21 Ibid., p. 168.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 169.

revolution' abstracted from time and space? As Lukacs says, "Those who see Lenin merely as a clever or even brilliant exponent of realpolitik thoroughly misunderstand the essence of his method. But those who think that they can find in his decisions 'formulas' and 'precepts' for correct and practical action everywhere misunderstand him even more deeply. Lenin never laid down 'general rules' which could be 'applied' in a number of different cases. His 'truths' grow from a concrete analysis of the concrete situation based on a dialectical approach to history. Only a caricature, vulgar Leninism can result from a mechanical 'generalization' of his insights and decisions."<sup>24</sup>

(Roy's formal acceptance of Lenin's theses the ~~the~~ ~~the~~ central issue of which was the actuality of world revolution becomes clear when he takes Lenin's idea of supporting the national liberation movements and converts it into a permanent theoretical position without any specificity for building a revolutionary communist movement within the confines of single-nations locked in anti-imperialist struggles.)

On the question of 'approaching world revolution' Roy continued to stand by his original idea that "without the breaking up of the colonial empire, the overthrow of the capitalist system in Europe does not appear possible."<sup>25</sup>

24 Lukacs, Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought, p. 83.

25 Adhikari, vol. I, p. 180, from Roy's original Draft Theses.

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Starting from this fundamental theses Roy works out the strategy and tactics and arrives at the conclusion that the Communist International and Communists should not support the national liberation movements led by the bourgeoisie but should exclusively concentrate their efforts to organize communist parties and to develop revolutionary workers and peasants movements. Roy argued that support to bourgeois led liberation movements would lead to the replacement of foreign capitalist rule by that of Indian capitalists. Now, if one abandons the perspective of 'approaching world revolution' as Roy does in reaching this conclusion, then accepting Roy's position is not a matter of principle or a permanently laid down theoretical premise. Given the conditions of class struggle in a particular country Roy's evaluation may or may not prove correct at a given historical moment, in the country in question. Therefore the logical question is why did Lenin oppose Roy on this count? Was Lenin correcting or directing Roy within the Royist perspective of building a communist movement in a single colonial country, be it India or China? (over)

This is implied in Hatcher when he writes: "Though Lenin and Roy agreed <sup>to</sup> on the principle of supporting "revolutionary movements of liberation" they differed markedly in their analysis of the Indian situation with respect to the class structure of the leadership of the Indian national Congress, and the relative strength of class forces within

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(Page 18 Follows)

India. <sup>26</sup>

In our understanding of Lenin's methodology, it is absurd to suggest that Lenin would claim to hold an opinion with respect to the class structure of the Indian National Congress leadership, or on the strength of class forces in India, without a detailed socio-economic analysis. But of course, Haitheox views Lenin's position as "an analysis of the Indian situation", which was different from Roy's analysis. Whether Roy ever made a proper analysis and studied Indian conditions concretely is still open to discussion, but Lenin certainly never did, and never for a moment claimed any such authority.

Lenin looked at the question of support to the national bourgeoisie from an entirely different standpoint. Reporting to the Second Congress on the international situation and fundamental tasks of C.I., he remarked: "If, on the one hand, the economic position of the masses has become intolerable, and, on the other hand, the disintegration described by Keynes has set in and is growing among the negligible minority of all-powerful victor countries, then we are in the presence of the maturing of the conditions for the world revolution."<sup>27</sup> Consequently Lenin argued: "World Imperialism shall fall when the revolutionary onslaught <sup>of</sup>

26 Haitheox, op. cit.

27 Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 31, p. 225.



✓ the exploited and oppressed workers in each country, overcoming resistance from petty-bourgeois elements and the influence of the small upper-crust of labour aristocrats, merges with the revolutionary onslaught of hundreds of millions of people who have hitherto stood beyond the pale of history....<sup>28</sup> It was this alliance or convergence that Lenin was urging on to keep its appointment for the overthrow of imperialism which was the chief obstacle in the victory of the world proletarian movement. ✓

After expressing full faith in the approaching world revolution at the end of his speech Lenin concluded hopefully: ✓ "Today the advanced proletariat is everywhere with us. A proletarian army exists everywhere, although sometimes it is poorly organized and needs re-organizing. If our comrades in all lands help us now to organize a united army, no shortcomings will prevent us from accomplishing our task. That task is the world proletarian revolution, the creation of a world Soviet Republic."<sup>29</sup>

✓ So Lenin was approaching all the questions in his colonial theses primarily from the point of view of the dictatorship of the world proletariat, which he was convinced was on the immediate historical agenda, because of the utter crisis of world capitalism. This theme runs throughout his

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28 Ibid., p. 232.

29 Ibid., p. 234.

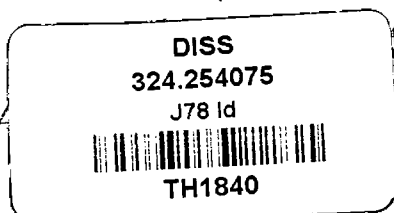
whole speech at the Second Congress. "All over the world, the bourgeois system is experiencing a tremendous revolutionary crisis. The revolutionary parties must now "prove" in practice that they have sufficient understanding and organization, contact with the exploited masses, and determination and skill to utilise this crisis for a successful, a victorious revolution. It is mainly to prepare this 'proof' that we have gathered at this Congress...."<sup>30</sup> Nothing could be more explicit than Lenin's assertion that "...in the theses I have submitted to the present Congress, I have dwelt most of all on the tasks connected with preparations for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and have given as concrete and exact a definition of them as possible."<sup>31</sup> This sharp comment was meant as a rebuke to a leader of a party desiring affiliation to the Third International and who had commented that the current revolutionary crisis would pass and settle down. Lenin called this "not merely an inability, but also an unwillingness to take advantage, in a revolutionary sense, of the revolutionary crisis."<sup>32</sup>

Boy, speaking exclusively from the point of view of the colonial country, asked the question as to how these colonial countries would advance towards socialism? Would

30 Ibid., p. 227.

31 Ibid., p. 223.

32 Ibid.



they necessarily go through a period of capitalist development after winning independence? Lenin replied in the negative, and it was precisely from the standpoint of approaching world revolution when he said: "If the victorious revolutionary proletariat conducts systematic propaganda among them, and the Soviet governments come to their aid with all the means at their disposal - in that event it will be mistaken to assume that the backward peoples must inevitably go through the capitalist stage of development."<sup>33</sup>

Whatever Lenin is saying in his colonial theses, on the question of alliance with the national bourgeoisie, on the question of building independent communist movements, he is saying mainly in the above discussed historical context.

The moment one abandons this specificity of the approaching world revolution which Lenin emphasized in his opening speech at the Congress, one not only becomes unable to pose a single question correctly on the colonial question, but one also reduces a concrete, problematic position, to a general theoretical guideline. The best example of this error is the Russian expert on the colonial thesis, A. Resnikov. He writes: "Following the Revolution, in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism, Lenin advanced and scientifically substantiated fundamental, programmatic and

tactical theses on the national-colonial question."<sup>34</sup>

Thus Reznikov goes beyond Adhikari in interpreting Lenin's historico-specific policy as a theoretical fundament of the entire epoch of transition from capitalism to socialism, in the colonial areas.

✓ This was basically the mistake made by M.N. Roy and other communists later; the stripping off of all historicity in Lenin's proposition of alliance with the national bourgeoisie and the conversion of immediate alignments of world revolutionary strategy into abstract tactics for all time. And this was diametrically opposed to Lenin whose writings on all questions show his painstaking, analytical method of evaluating a situation and then coming to a conclusion. And to imply that he departed from this in the colonial theses for the first time in his revolutionary career, only reveals a vast ignorance of Lenin's style of thinking and consequently the failure to grasp its politico-historical implications.

It was not by accident that at the Fourth Congress of the C.I. referring to the resolution on the structure, methods and activity of the Communist parties which had been adopted by the Third Congress, Lenin said: "The resolution is an excellent one, but it is almost entirely Russian, that is to say, everything in it is based on Russian conditions....I

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34 A. Reznikov, "How Lenin Fought Sectarianism in the National-Colonial Movement", p. 57, from booklet entitled Lenin and Revolution in the East (Novosti Press, Moscow, 1969).

have the impression that we made a big mistake with this resolution, namely, that we blocked our own road to further success."<sup>35</sup>

It is no less significant that Lenin's main recommendation to the Communists, both of the Soviet Union and of other countries, at this Congress, was that they should study. He said: "I think that after five years of the Russian revolution the most important thing for all of us, Russian and foreign comrades alike, is to sit down and study....No must take advantage of every moment of respite from fighting, from war, to study, and to study from scratch."<sup>36</sup>

Thus, Roy's failure to work out a theoretical framework for the Indian party and its revolution. Instead, trying to fit in Lenin's specific statement of policy as a theoretical formulation to help him analyse the class positions, Roy became able (or so he thought) to reconcile theoretically those two

35 Lenin, "Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution", C.W., vol. 33, p. 430.

36 Lenin, C.W., vol. 33, pp. 430-31.

Bukharin in retrospect, expressed a similar view saying that the Chinese revolution had made it possible to perceive that the Comintern had only a general notion of the colonial problem. In each concrete case it was necessary to analyse the class structures, "The entire complication of the social class entanglement, the great difficulty of the tasks connected with the conduct of such a tremendous colonial revolution, only faced us quite recently in grim reality." Inprecorr, n. 73, 1927, p. 1680.

trends i.e. support bourgeoisie and build Communist Party which till then had seemed to him contradictory.

This opportunistic solution to the theoretical problem led in future to the corresponding opportunist politics of Roy. What is interesting however is that though Roy's politics are denounced with enough candour the above mentioned solution to the theoretical problem is not only accepted but made a starting point to carry an analysis of the roles of various classes in Indian society. It is not surprising that it is only here that Adhikari sees Roy's contribution though in a negative way when he poses the questions of the future perspective of national and colonial revolutions.<sup>37</sup>

It is only in the above context that we can discuss the question of alliance with the bourgeoisie. Adhikari comments that by advancing in his theses the slogan of supporting the really revolutionary bourgeois-democratic forces in the colonies, Lenin formulated for the first time the basis of the idea of the creation of an anti-imperialist united front. This was an entirely new principle.<sup>38</sup>

Till the time of the Second Congress Lenin had already solved theoretically as well as practically the problems of one specific alliance in the context of the Russian Revolution that of the working-class and peasantry. Now in his colonial theses,

37 G. Adhikari, vol. I, p. 165.

38 Ibid., p. 197.

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he put forward the slogan of a different alliance i.e. the alliance between the working class and the national bourgeoisie in a different context. Adhikari is right in recognising this alliance as an entirely new principle but we cannot accept the way he understands this alliance and the conditions of its establishment.

The class alliance between the working-class and peasantry in a country with belated capitalist development is fundamentally different from the so-called class alliance between the working class and national bourgeoisie, in the anti-imperialist struggle. [The difference lies in the fact that the alliance between the working class and peasantry suffering under medieval oppression is strictly a class alliance based on common interests. In the case of Russia the objective basis for the alliance of the working-class and peasantry was established by Russia's socio-economic structure.] In this case it was an alliance with a class which because of its objective class position and cultural backwardness was doomed to remain a politically vacillating stratum, a class whose destiny is ultimately decided by the struggle between the working-class and the bourgeoisie to capture state power. Such an alliance is the revolutionary alliance of all the oppressed and working-masses, worked out from the point of view of a concrete understanding of the conditions of the proletarian revolution in a particular country.

The alliance between the working-class and bourgeoisie in the anti-imperialist struggle is the alliance of two

competing classes the aim of both being the same i.e. to capture state power. Because of this aim their economic interests are not only fundamentally opposed but the fate of which would be decided immediately after the defeat of their common enemy. Whereas in the alliance of the working-class and peasantry, no doubt their class aims were different, however, it was only by a joint struggle that they could realise their different aims. In the case of the first alliance i.e. between the working-class and peasantry, only the working class is capable of exercising hegemony and the march towards victory would be determined by the degree of hegemony exercised by it.

Whereas in the second alliance, that of the working-class and bourgeoisie the question as to who would exercise hegemony between the two contending ideological forces would be determined by many concrete factors evolved in the struggle against a common enemy.

In the anti-imperialist struggle, on the one hand, the national bourgeoisie seeks help from the proletarian movement, while on the other hand, when it sees the increasingly swift approach of the proletarian revolution it is pushed towards an alliance with feudalism and imperialism. Thus the bourgeoisie's attitude towards alliance springs from the fluctuating fear of the greater evils and alliance always remains problematic and not a class alliance based on common interests.



Two conditions determined Lenin's method of posing the question of alliance in a specific context. First, the positing of the ultimate goal sought to be achieved, and tactical means which without doubt ensure your movement growing towards that goal. Second, in the Leninist conception of alliance, the other class is always looked upon with distrust, constantly acknowledging the possibility of its turning hostile and always preparing for that eventuality. As a result of this, the form and content of the alliance is continuously worked out in such a way that at every phase of the movement the final hegemony of the proletariat is safeguarded.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE ROY-LENIN DEBATE AND THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS - PRIORITIES

The crux of the Lenin-Roy debate was the question of the attitude towards anti-imperialist movements led by the bourgeoisie. These liberation movements, to a greater or lesser extent, in terms of organization and strength, already possessed, in the principal oppressed countries, a structure, line and leadership of their own, whereas the Communist parties of these countries played a very minor role at this period or were non-existent. As late as the Vth Congress of the Communist International, there were in the whole of Asia nine sections of the Comintern. These were China with 800 members; Java, 2,000; Persia, 600; Egypt, 700; Palestine, 100; Turkey, 600; Japan and Korea, where small illegal groups existed; and India, where the party was not yet structured on the national scale and there were only some scattered cells with very few members.<sup>1</sup> These "scattered cells" in India were represented at the Communist International by N.N. Roy.

Even more significant was the fact that the proletariat was an extremely weak group in colonial society. Even in countries that had experienced a certain amount of industrial

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1. Inprecorr (English edition), vol. 4, no. 57, 12 August 1924, p. 607.

development such as China, India, and the Dutch East Indies, the percentage of workers in the population as a whole was very slight. Of course, a conscientious student of Russian history and the Russian revolution such as Roy aspired to be, would not permit numerical weakness to disturb his equanimity.

Kautsky's total rejection of equating proletarian numbers with socialist consciousness had been warmly characterized by Lenin as "the profoundly true and important words of Karl Kautsky...."<sup>2</sup> It would be the most blatant negligence

however, to forget the context in which Lenin wrote. Placing it in its proper context, he himself wrote: "The chief distinguishing feature of Russia in regard to the point we are examining is that the very beginning of the spontaneous working class movement, on the one hand, and of the turn of progressive public opinion towards Marxism, on the other, was marked by the combination of heterogeneous elements under a common flag to fight the common enemy."<sup>3</sup> And again, wrote Lenin: "Marxist books were published one after another, Marxist journals and newspapers were founded, nearly everyone became a Marxist".<sup>4</sup>

To sum up, "Hence we had both the spontaneous awakening of the working masses, their awakening to conscious life and conscious

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<sup>2</sup> Lenin, What is to be done? p. 39. The same attitude is expressed by Trotsky in "Results and Prospects" when he writes:

<sup>3</sup> Lenin, What is to be done? p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

struggle, and a revolutionary youth, armed with social-Democratic theory and straining towards the workers."<sup>5</sup>

( These lengthy quotations become necessary in order to reveal how Roy's entire theoretical activity in the context of India was a mechanical emulation of Lenin and the Russian revolution, without the least concern for specificity and contextual argument.) On the other hand, Lenin had emphatically declared that in order to make use of the experiences of other countries "what is required is the ability to treat these experiences critically and to test them independently."<sup>6</sup> *v. e.*

( Therefore, the most important factor involved in assessing the working class movement in the colonies was its degree of awakening, its politicization.) To pose it thus is to answer the question, for (the recently formed working class in the colonies lacked revolutionary traditions or political experience and was a class with an extremely low cultural level. The great majority were illiterate; so that when Roy conjured up the great revolutionary force of the small industrial proletariat,<sup>7</sup> Lenin was compelled to correct him.<sup>8</sup>

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5 Ibid., p. 32.

6 Ibid., p. 26.

7 Roy himself called it small, consisting of only 5 million workers, in his thesis presented at the second Congress of the Communist International.

8 In the discussion on Roy's theses Lenin said that though India had 5 million proletarians and 37 million landless peasants, Indian Communists so far had not succeeded in founding a communist party in country.... Quoted by Ashakari, Documents of History of CPI, 1917 to 1922, vol. 1, p. 163.

Roy's belief that "the mass movements in the colonies are growing independently of the nationalist movements"<sup>9</sup> led him to the conclusion that "to support the colonial bourgeois-democratic movements would amount to helping the growth of the national spirit which will surely obstruct the awakening of class consciousness in the masses".<sup>10</sup>

In Lenin, however, a totally different strand of thought emerges; the task must be to create revolutionary parties and not just Communist parties in name only. "You will have to base yourselves on the bourgeois nationalism which is awakening, and must awaken, among these peoples, and which has its historical justification."<sup>11</sup>

These two clearly distinct attitudes of Roy and Lenin have been put together by both E.H. Carr and G. Adhikari<sup>12</sup> within a single perspective: that of the formation of Communist parties in the colonies and the attitudes of these parties towards their national bourgeoisie who were their class enemies. This problem, which was continuously being posed by Roy, did not fall within Lenin's perspective which was dominated by the aspect of relations between the

9 Roy's supplementary thesis (original draft), available in Adhikari, vol. 1, p. 184.

10 Ibid., p. 188.

11 Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 30, p. 162.

12 G. Adhikari, Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India, 1917-1922, vol. 1; and E.H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 3, pp. 474-6.

2. N. the diff. bet boys "working class of the whole world" & Lenin "revolutionary forces of all the countries of the world."

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Comintern as representative of the revolutionary proletariat of the capitalist West, and the national liberation movements of the colonies, and also, between Soviet Russia, as a state, and these movements as representatives of the oppressed nations. Lenin constantly stressed, as has been brought out in the first chapter, the objective possibility for the Third International as leader of the proletarian revolution in the West, to rally around it the oppressed peoples that were fighting as nations against Imperialism. Thesis 5 of Roy's original draft presented at the Second Congress said: "The Communist International is the concentrated will of the world revolutionary proletariat. Its mission is to organize the working class of the whole world for the overthrow of the capitalist order and the establishment of communism."<sup>13</sup> Lenin amended this thesis to read "The Third International is a fighting body which must assume the task of combining the revolutionary forces of all the countries of the world."<sup>14</sup> Thesis 7 in the same text reiterates "for the overthrow of foreign capitalism which is the first step towards revolution in the colonies the co-operation of the bourgeois nationalist revolutionary elements is useful."<sup>15</sup> The "first step", the "cardinal idea", these emphatic phrases of Lenin's denote his priority,

13 Adhikari, op. cit., p. 132.

14 Ibid., p. 133. (In the amended and adopted text of Roy's supplementary theses).

15 Ibid., p. 135.

which is the essence of his differences with Roy. His 'totality' of concentration on World Imperialism as the main obstacle to the world socialist revolution is to be sharply distinguished from Roy's near total absorption in the 'colonial revolution', in the questions of Communist Party formation and the Party's relations with other colonial forces and classes.

Lenin's priority is indisputably clear when he says: "The breaking-up of the colonial empire, together with the proletarian revolution in the home country, will overthrow the capitalist system in Europe....These two forces must be coordinated if the final success of the world revolution is to be guaranteed."<sup>16</sup>

From Lenin's perspective flows his priority, and from his priority emerges his point of departure; i.e. the existence of anti-imperialist national movements, led by the bourgeoisie whose struggles furthered and widened his perspective of world revolution, and so necessarily became 'revolutionary'.

This point of departure taken by Lenin in his Theses at the Second Congress of the Communist International was based on the definite assumption that the contradiction between the basic aims of the bourgeois-national movements and the interests of Imperialism was sufficiently deep to allow an alliance between them and Soviet Russia, together with the

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

proletariat of advanced countries. Earlier, at the eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, held immediately after the foundation of the Third International, Bukharin had said: "If we propound the solution of the right of self-determination for the colonies...we lose nothing by it. On the contrary, we gain...The most outright nationalist movement...is only water for our mill, since it contributes to the destruction of English imperialism."<sup>17</sup>

Lenin reported that in the colonial Commission at the Second Congress, Quelch of the British Socialist Party had said that the ordinary English worker would regard it as treason to help the dependent peoples to rebel against British rule. Radek replied to this that the British proletariat itself would never be free of the capitalist yoke unless it actively supported the colonial revolutionary movement.<sup>18</sup>

That national constrictions or problems of consolidating the working class parties within a specific national framework were not the immediate preoccupation of the Bolshevik leaders at the Third International's II<sup>nd</sup> Congress is abundantly clear from this. These leaders' understanding of the historical conjuncture in which they stood gave them a sense of urgency in regard to the colonies which were the Achilles heel of British imperialism. "The Comintern would

17 Jane Degras, ed., The Communist International, 1919-1943, Documents, vol. I, p. 133.

18 Ibid., p. 139.



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judge the British comrades not by their articles in favour of liberation, but by the number of them imprisoned for agitation in Ireland, Egypt, or India, and among the troops despatched to suppress risings in these countries."<sup>19</sup>

That this priority to deal heavy blows to world imperialism and integrate all anti-imperialist currents was unquestionably predominant at the II<sup>nd</sup> Congress was sharply specified by Radek in the discussions held by the colonial commission during the IV<sup>th</sup> Congress. He suggested that "some of the speakers had been too optimistic. The Second Congress theses which spoke of support for the movements in the East did not refer to class struggles."<sup>20</sup>

From the above discussion we can conclude that for Lenin, strengthening anti-imperialism in the colonies was the only way to further the struggle of the Western proletariat against capitalism. A coordination of these two forces was essential if the world revolution against world imperialism was to be guaranteed. "The entire policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial question must be based primarily on bringing together the proletariat and working classes of all nations and countries for the common revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the landowners

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19 Ibid. [Paraphrased from Protokoll, II, p. 224]

20 J. Degras, ed., Communist International Documents, vol. I, p. 383. [Paraphrased from Thesen und Resolutionen, IV, p. 42. November 1922]

and the bourgeoisie. For only such united action will ensure victory over capitalism, without which it is impossible to abolish national oppression and inequality of rights."<sup>21</sup>

After emphasizing the significance of anti-imperialist movements in the colonies, Lenin posed the question of how they were to be strengthened and what role the Communist International would play in it.

Implicit in Lenin's theses were the following fundamental assumptions based on a generalized view of the existing reality in the colonies. In the first place, there already existed in the colonies significant national liberation movements under the influence of bourgeois leaderships. Secondly, the Communist groups in these countries were either very small or non-existent. Thirdly, wherever peasant movements existed they were not revolutionary enough and their level of politicization was extremely low. Fourthly, the working class movement in these countries was not only not advanced, but was already under the influence of bourgeois leadership. Fifthly, the contradiction between the national bourgeoisie and imperialism was sufficiently deep to permit a unified anti-imperialist struggle led by the bourgeoisie. Last of all, but extremely important, was his evaluation of nationalism as a powerful force. Thesis 12 emphasized that the centuries-old

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<sup>21</sup> Lenin, "Theses on the National and Colonial Question", adopted by the 2nd Comintern Congress, in J. Degras, vol. 1, p. 141.

enslavement of the colonial peoples had left behind not only feelings of bitterness but also feelings of distrust of the oppressing nations as a whole, including the proletariat of these nations. From this it followed "that it is the duty of the class conscious Communist proletariat of all countries to be especially cautious and particularly attentive to the national feelings, in themselves out of date, in countries and peoples that have been long enslaved; it is also their duty to make concessions in order to remove this distrust and prejudices the more quickly."<sup>22</sup>

Starting from these assumptions Lenin suggested that the only way anti-imperialist movements could be strengthened in the colonies was to support and align with existing national liberation movements being led by the bourgeoisie. On the question of evolving a modus operandi Lenin left the options open for, as he said: "The form which this support shall take should be discussed with the Communist party of the country in question, if there is one."<sup>23</sup> This would be the only way possible of taking cognizance of the concrete realities operating in specific countries. The evolution of the modus operandi was clearly not a question of mere theoretical formulations but one that needed to be worked out by undertaking

<sup>22</sup> J. Degras, vol. I, p. 144. Lenin, Theses on National and Colonial Question.

<sup>23</sup> Degras, *ibid.*, p. 143.

"first of all a precise analysis of the given environment, historical and above all economic".<sup>24</sup>

Lenin apparently assumed that all later-day commissions and Congresses would discuss and develop the operational forms on the basis of their study and experiences in various countries. The struggle waged by Lenin against his opponents at the Second Congress was purely theoretical. It centered around the question of whether the Third International should support or make any form of alliance with resurgent national liberation movements. The concomitant implication of working out the modus operandi was a practical task left to be taken up later.

M.N. Roy challenged the general premises of Lenin's thesis regarding historical reality in all the colonial countries, especially in the case of India. He put forward the following premises which were not only different from Lenin's, but to some extent contradictory: (a) The bourgeois-democratic nationalist movements in the colonies are limited to the small middle-class which does not reflect the aspirations of the masses; (b) The masses, especially in India, are not with the bourgeois-nationalist leaders - they are moving towards revolution independently of the bourgeois-nationalist movement; (c) The masses distrust the political leaders who always lead them astray and prevent them from

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

revolutionary action; (d) These are to be found in the dependent countries two distinct movements which everyday grow "farther and farther apart" from each other. — One is the bourgeois-nationalist movement with a programme of national independence and the other is the mass action of the ignorant and poor peasants and workers; (e) It would be a mistake to assume that the bourgeois nationalist movement expresses the sentiments and aspirations of the general population.

Thesis 4 in Roy's original draft declared that "without the breaking-up of the colonial empire the overthrow of the capitalist system in Europe does not appear possible." Lenin modified this to read "the breaking up of the colonial empire, together with the proletarian revolution in the home country, will overthrow the capitalist system in Europe."<sup>25</sup>

Another modification was of thesis no. 8, of the same draft, in which Roy asserted that "in most of the colonies there already exist organized socialist or Communist parties in close relation to the mass movement." Lenin amended it to read; "In most of the colonial countries there already exist organized revolutionary parties which strive to be in close connection with the masses."<sup>26</sup>

The reason for modifying thesis 4 lay in Lenin's

<sup>25</sup> G. Adhikari, Documents of the History of the CPI, 1917-1922, vol. I, pp. 130-31.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 130-7.

conception of the 'actuality of world revolution which has already been discussed in Chapter I. (The idea of making the European revolution dependant on Asian 'revolutions' was very remote from Lenin's conjunctural thought.) Modification of thesis 8 was due to Lenin's convincing knowledge of the non-existence of Communist parties in many of the colonial countries including India.) But apart from a few deletions of paragraphs which directly contradicted the significance Lenin attached to anti-imperialist national movements, Roy's draft was accepted jointly with Lenin's at the second Congress. The significant question which is usually overlooked or perhaps consciously evaded is why were Roy's theses accepted as supplementary to Lenin's theses by the Communist International?

The evasion of this issue has been pointed out in an article in Proletarian Path in which G. Adhikari is criticised for fostering the belief (though indirectly) that "Lenin did not really take Roy's supplementary theses seriously and that it was only Lenin's magnanimity which allowed Roy to move his theses as consolation to a budding young Communist from an oriental country."<sup>27</sup> The counter-explanation offered however is more polemical than historical. To our mind, the primary reason for accepting Roy's supplementary theses was Lenin's inability to dismiss Roy's premises of

<sup>27</sup> Moni Gaha, "Colonial Thesis of the Communist International and its treatment by the C.P.I.", in Proletarian Path.

colonial, and especially Indian, reality. This inability was due to Lenin's acknowledgedly inadequate and incomplete study of the situation in the colonies. In a pamphlet Lenin wrote in January 1921, he admitted: "I know next to nothing about the insurgents and revolutionaries of South China (apart from the two or three articles by Sun Yat-sen, and a few books and newspaper articles I read many years ago)."<sup>28</sup> In light of this it is unwarranted to expect that his knowledge of Indian reality was any more concrete or conclusive. And as the context in which Lenin was writing was criticism of Bukharin's "approach of pure abstraction", it is unlikely that he would himself indulge in a similar exercise. Referring to his negligible knowledge of China, Lenin wrote: "That is all I need to know in order to write theses a la Bukharin.... Because no concrete study is made of this particular controversy, question, approach, etc., the result is a dead and empty eclecticism".<sup>29</sup> These historians or scholars who attribute to Lenin's formulations in the Colonial Theses a 'theory' or guideline of colonial revolution are accusing Lenin of the same "dead and empty eclecticism". For surely, Lenin had made no "concrete study of this particular" or any other colonial country. <sup>(2)</sup> Precisely due to this fact, Lenin

<sup>28</sup> "Once again on the Trade Unions...." Lenin, C.W., vol. 32, p. 95. Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

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accepted Roy's theses as perhaps being closer to the real situation in the colonies of Great Britain. Reporting to the colonial commission, Lenin had emphasized that Roy's colonial theses "were framed chiefly from the standpoint of the situation in India and other big Asian countries oppressed by Britain. Herein lies their great importance to us."<sup>30</sup>

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The second and equally important reason for Roy's theses being accepted, was that the conclusions drawn from Roy's premises did not contradict Lenin's main line of thought which called for the strengthening of anti-imperialism, though in this case, he suggested a different method of achieving this objective. Lenin argued that if the colonial situation as described by Roy on his own premises was accepted, then "the foremost and necessary task is the formation of Communist parties which will organize the peasants and workers and lead them to the revolution and to the establishment of Soviet Republics.) Thus the masses in the backward countries may reach communism, not through capitalist development, but led by the class conscious proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries."<sup>31</sup>

The bourgeois nationalists according to Roy, were already distrusted by the masses who were moving towards revolution independently of the bourgeois-democratic leaders.

<sup>30</sup> Lenin, ColM, vol. 31, p. 241.

<sup>31</sup> Amended draft of Roy's supplementary theses. Adhikari, vol. I, p. 125.



As the influence of these leaders was limited to the small middle class, the formation of Communist parties, the development of class consciousness in the working masses, and the struggle against bourgeois control over them became the logical and most immediate tasks to be taken up in the colonies.

Because, only then would the further strengthening of anti-imperialism be achieved which was the objective Lenin placed before the colonies.

Thus, starting from two different sets of premises, following two distinctly different methods, Lenin suggested the achievement of the end to which he gave priority: that of intensifying the struggle against Imperialism. Which method was to be followed by the Communists of a particular country would be determined by their selection of one of the above sets of premises basing themselves on their assessment of the reality obtaining in their country. The point to be underlined here is that Lenin did not arbitrarily advise the Communists to commit themselves to one or other method of achieving the objective of anti-imperialism which had priority in this conjuncture. In his own thesis 6, Lenin specified: "our policy must be to bring into being a close alliance of all national and colonial liberation movements with Soviet Russia; the forms taken by this alliance will be determined by the stage of development reached by the Communist movement\*

\* Emphasis mine.

among the proletariat of each country or by the revolutionary liberation movement in the underdeveloped countries and among the backward nationalities."<sup>32</sup>

It is only in this context and not in an abstract manner that we can approach the question of the formation of Communist parties whose immediate object in the colonies at that juncture being to expand and strengthen the anti-imperialist struggle.

Posing this question in the abstract gives rise to mutually exclusive historiographic attitudes which have led two historians into drawing essentially false conclusions. F. Claudin, basing himself on the premises underlying Lenin's own theses, concludes categorically that Lenin's theses implicitly admitted that for a long time to come the leadership of the colonial revolution would remain locally in the hands of the national bourgeoisie, even though on the world scale, the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle would be taken by the proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries and the Soviet state.<sup>33</sup> He characterises as "highly significant" a passage taken from Lenin's speech at the second Congress in which he had said: "It is beyond doubt that any national movement can only be a bourgeois-democratic movement,

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32 G. Adhikari, vol. 1, p. 200.

33 Claudin, Fernando, The Communist Movement, p. 262.

since the overwhelming mass of the population in the backward countries consists of peasants who represent bourgeois-capitalist relationships. It would be utopian to believe that proletarian parties in these backward countries, if indeed they can emerge in them, can pursue, Communist tactics and a Communist policy without establishing definite relations with the peasant movement and without giving it effective support."<sup>34</sup>

From this Claudin draws the conclusion that "Lenin is doubtful whether such proletarian parties can be formed in the colonial countries. And this is logical enough if one thinks of the characteristics that were essential if a party was to be regarded as 'proletarian' from the Bolshevik standpoint."<sup>35</sup>

Claudin sees the essence of Lenin's statement (quoted above) in stressing the necessity for proletarian parties in the colonies to "establish relations with" and "support" the peasant movement, and not in 'leading' it. The question of working-class 'hegemony' over the peasant masses is not even hinted at.

This formulation, according to Claudin, is synonymous to supporting bourgeois-national movements, because peasant movements represent bourgeois capitalist relations. He writes, that for Lenin, the peasants were the essential component of bourgeois democracy and as such, his stress on "efforts...to

<sup>34</sup> Lenin, C.W., vol. 31, pp. 241-2.

<sup>35</sup> Claudin, op. cit., p. 263.

✓ give the peasant movement as revolutionary a character as possible",<sup>36</sup> constituted no obstacle to an alliance with the bourgeois national movement. It was only a question of giving this democracy a more revolutionary orientation.<sup>37</sup> Claudin is categorically of the opinion that, for Lenin, the formation of Communist parties in the colonies was highly "problematical".

◇ All this completely fails to explain and, in fact obscures, why Lenin, in amending Roy's draft, should admit that "the foremost and necessary task is the formation of Communist parties which will organize the peasants and workers and lead them to the revolution...."<sup>38</sup>

That Lenin here was proceeding to logical conclusions from the basic premises of Roy's draft - which imbued colonial reality with revolutionary dynamism - is completely forgotten. For, though Lenin toned down the sharpness of Roy's theses, he accepted the crucial 'facts' of Roy's assessment due to his own uncertainty regarding the real situation in the colonies. For Lenin, a significant difference was made if in the colonies there really were "two distinct movements

36 Lenin, "Thesis on the National and Colonial Question", J. Degras, op. cit., p. 143.

37 This view is further supported by thesis 9 in Roy's preliminary draft as amended by Lenin where he says: "It would be extremely erroneous in many of the oriental countries to try to solve the agrarian problem according to pure Communist principles". Adhikari, vol. 1, p. 137.

38 Adhikari, vol. 1, p. 135.

which every day grew further apart from each other", a 'fact' he did not or could not challenge, and consequently retained. } u

Even more significant was the inclusion of another 'fact' - that in "most of the colonies there already exist organized revolutionary parties which strive to be in close connection with the working-masses." These 'facts' seemed to provide a sound basis for conceiving the creation of revolutionary mass parties in the colonies and not Communist parties in name only. And once Communist parties could be conceived, then Lenin's conception of the party produced by his experience in the Russian revolution made it imperative that they should "maintain the independence of the proletarian movement, even if it is only in an embryonic stage".<sup>39</sup>

Dr. G. Adhikari writes that the "very sectarian and wrong approach of Roy" is evident in his preliminary draft prepared for the Second Congress. But Lenin, he claims, corrected this flaw in the amended theses which was finally accepted. He contemptuously accuses: "pseudo-research workers of the bourgeoisie...actuated by anti-communism have "explained" these errors and shortcomings (of Communists in the colonies) by the theory that Lenin himself compromised with the sectarian approach in Roy's theses".<sup>40</sup>

39 Lenin, Thesis on National and Colonial Question, Second Congress, J. Degree, p. 144.

40 G. Adhikari, vol. 1, p. 170. ✓

S. J. S. H. I.  
 2000 if no Communist  
 why a Communist acceptance  
 of Roy's?

While dismissing any idea of compromise on Lenin's part Adhikari fails to provide an alternative explanation for his acceptance of Roy's theses. The question he fails to ask, the only question which would yield a meaningful answer is, wherein lay the roots of Roy's sectarianism? Not merely in his theoretical "contradiction of the national liberation movement to the rising, revolutionary workers' and peasants' movement in the colonies."<sup>41</sup> The roots of Roy's sectarianism lay in Roy's assessment of colonial reality in the form of basic premises underlying his theses. And many of these premises (as discussed already) were accepted by Lenin in the amended theses. Basing himself exclusively on these premises (Roy's) Lenin suggested how through the formation of a Communist party they could lead and direct the already present revolutionary movement of the masses towards consistent anti-Imperialism. Such a suggestion could have been based only on Roy's assertion that "revolutionary mass action" had an independent identity and force and was to be distinguished from the bourgeois-democratic movement.

The Soviet historians Resnikov and Shestitko and Adhikari in India, interpret this suggestion of Lenin's as a positive injunction to Communists in the colonies - a suggestion flowing essentially from Roy's assessment of

41. Ibid., p. 166.

colonial reality. But, at the same time they accuse Roy of drawing an inaccurate and exaggerated picture of revolutionary ferment and <sup>echo</sup> Lenin's formulation in his own theses that "All communist parties must support by action the revolutionary liberation movements in these countries;" <sup>42</sup> a formulation based on Lenin's own knowledge of the colonial situation.

Once these two divergent lines of thought are fused then one necessarily inherits the original paradox of Roy. To participate in every mass movement led by the bourgeoisie, to actively support national liberation movements, to strive for many petit-bourgeois reforms, to unite and further the anti-imperialist struggle, and yet to form independent Communist parties politically and organizationally and maintain this independence at all costs. That the whole history of the Communist Party of India was like a pendulum striking itself against these two "guidelines" is tragically revealed when Adhikari writes: "The Leninist guidance of combining the support to the national liberation movement with fight against bourgeois counterbalancing tendency and maintaining the independence of proletarian parties and of peasants' and workers' movement was sometimes distorted either in the sectarian or reformist direction. It either became <sup>contradictory</sup> ~~contradicting~~ proletarian hegemony to support to the national liberation struggle or merging with

42 J. Degras, vol. I, p. 143.

the latter and neglecting to develop proletarian independence and initiative to unleash the agrarian and antifeudal revolution.<sup>43</sup>

This dilemma arises out of inability to perceive what was a basic assumption of Lenin's; that the question of the formation of Communist parties or the expansion of existing Communist nuclei were both inextricably linked with the extent to which they would strengthen the anti-imperialist movements.

A dilemma  
P. 170

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43 Adhikari, vol. 1, p. 170.



## CHAPTER III

### THE SHIFT IN CONJUNCTURE

The near certain expectations of a world revolution sooner or later, which were evinced in the Second Congress of the Communist International rapidly receded into the realization of a "protracted struggle between imperialism and the proletarian dictatorship", at the Fourth Congress.<sup>1</sup>

The shifting conjunctures of the European revolution, of the reality within Soviet Russia and in the colonial situations left a varying impact on the issues discussed at the Third and Fourth Congresses and on the nature of their formulations. This fact has to be constantly borne in mind in any further examination of Roy's theoretical activity and later his attempts to intervene in the Indian movement. Any shifts and nuances in Lenin's thought on the subject have also to be explored to reveal what has been called the 'conflict of perspectives' in the first chapter.

After the failure of the 'European revolution' since 1921 and after the 'March Action' and the retreat of the Red Army from Warsaw, the state apparatus in Russia entered a process of consolidation. By this time the first wave of economic recovery, following the introduction of NEP in 1921

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1 Documents of Fourth Comintern Congress, Thesis on the Eastern Question, in Jane Degras, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 333.

and the excellent harvest of 1922, reached its height. New agrarian, labour and civil codes promised legal stability, and substantial progress had been made towards the establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations with foreign countries. The Communist International no longer upheld the earlier enthusiastic 'offensive' in the balance of world forces. Lenin in a speech at the Third Congress of the CI affirmed that "in discussing the international position of Republic we must, politically, take into account the fact that a certain equilibrium has now undoubtedly set in between the forces that have been waging an open, armed struggle against each other for the supremacy of this or that leading class. It is an equilibrium between bourgeois society, the international bourgeoisie as a whole, and Soviet Russia."<sup>2</sup>

The unexpected delay in the spread of revolution over Europe, which was the determining cause of the internal changes and their character in Russia<sup>3</sup> was bound to effect the outlook and activities of the chief organ of the international revolution, the Communist International. Comparing the second and

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2 Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 32 (in Report on the Tactics of the B.C.P., July 5), p. 478.

3 Ibid., p. 480. Lenin said: "It was clear to us that without the support of the international world revolution the victory of the proletarian revolution was impossible" and on p. 490 he says "we are assisting the peasants because it is absolutely necessary to do so in order that we may retain political power."

third Congresses, Lenin said that the Comintern had passed from the tactics of assault to the tactics of siege, infiltration taking the place of open armed struggle.<sup>4</sup>

Uncertainty of the 'European revolution' and the immediate problems confronted internally in Russia tempered down, what earlier in 1920 had been, the 'heavy atmosphere of world revolution' (Lukacs). The speeches and writings of Zinoviev, Lenin and Trotsky consistently reflected the transitional phase they were passing through.<sup>5</sup>

The general resolution, however, warned against hastily anticipating the collapse of the Communist International. It said that given "the destruction...of capitalist equilibrium throughout the world....All the efforts of the Communist International were and are designed to exploit this situation to the full."<sup>6</sup>

At the level of broad generalizations this held true and so the Third Congress resolutions on the eastern question continued to maintain the importance of anti-imperialist struggles in the east for the proletarian revolution in the west. But at the level of what Lenin called, "a fundamental

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4 J. Degras, op. cit., p. 225.

5 Ibid. Trotsky is quoted as saying later "with the third Congress, it is realised that the post-war revolutionary ferment is over....The turn is taken to winning the masses, using the united front, that is, organizing the masses on a programme of transitional demands", p. 224.

6 Ibid., p. 233, in the Thesis on the World situation and the tasks of the Comintern adopted by the Third Comintern Congress.

preparation of the revolution", concentration was totally centered on making "a deep study of its concrete development in the advanced capitalist countries".<sup>7</sup>

This (above) was in consonance with the shrinking of perspectives for the Bolshevik leaders. The failures in Europe now preoccupied them. As it was the Russian leaders, chiefly Lenin, who had emphasized the significance of the colonies for the international revolution in the first place, their own distraction back to the problems in Europe could not but lead to neglect on this score.<sup>8</sup>

Zinoviev's bulky report on the work of the Communist International during the year 1921-22 contained exactly three sentences on the subject. "In the Near East the council of propaganda created by the Baku Congress is working. From the point of view of organization however much remains to be done. In the Far East the situation is similar...."<sup>9</sup>

At the Third Congress of the Communist International discussion for the last afternoon and the delegates from Asia got precisely five minutes each to speak. Roy, the Indian delegate, used the five minutes allotted to him to make an 'energetic protest' against the opportunist way in which

7 Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 32, p. 481.

8 E.H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 3, p. 385. "The eastern peoples evoked little interest in the rising Communist parties of central and western Europe; to the British, and to some extent also to the French, parties they were frankly a source of embarrassment."

9 Ibid. Quoted from Protokoll des III Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale (Hamburg, 1921).

the Eastern question was discussed. No attention had been paid to it during the Congress and when the Commission had at last met not a single member of the European or American delegations had attended.<sup>10</sup>

This is why, perhaps, Roy could stand unchallenged in his premises and accordingly make theoretical interventions in the Indian movement which were a continuation of his earlier positions. The leaders of the Communist International not only had no proper studies of the colonies on the basis of which they could mediate in the discussions, but were thoroughly immersed in the need to "make a deep study (of its concrete development) in the advanced capitalist countries",<sup>11</sup>

Lenin, in presenting his Theses for a Report on the Tactics of the R.C.P. to the Third Congress, fleetingly referred to the colonial and semi-colonial countries. He said: "The imperialist war of 1914-18 and the Soviet power in Russia are completing the process of converting these masses into an active factor in world political and in the revolutionary destruction of imperialism."<sup>12</sup> This was consistent with Lenin's earlier focus on the significance of the colonies for the overthrow of imperialism. In this context

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10 J. Degras, op. cit., p. 226. Carr using German sources writes that even in the discussion at the Congress, none of the recognised leaders of the Comintern, and not one Russian delegate, contributed.

11 Lenin, op. cit.

12 Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 32, p. 455.

he continued: "British India is at the head of these countries, and there revolution is maturing in proportion, on the one hand, to the growth of the industrial and railway proletariat, and, on the other, to the increase in the brutal terrorism of the British, who with ever greater frequency resort to massacres (Amritsar), public floggings, etc."<sup>13</sup>

This reference of Lenin's is extremely important in revealing the nature of his understanding of colonial movements. The 'revolution' he is speaking of here is apparently the 'anti-imperialist revolution' and the examples of its maturity are mass meetings in Amritsar protesting against colonialist terror.

Knowledge of the specific reality of existing movements and the levels of mass activity and organization in the colonial countries remained as nebulous as before in the minds of the Comintern leaders. Consequently, Roy's theses of 1920 and their basic premises went unexplored, leaving him secure in his theoretical convictions. The ironic feature of Roy's presence at the Third Congress of the Communist International was that he remained immune to the changes that were taking place in the conception and practice of Communist parties in Europe. For, the principled splitting of mass parties to create small, hard nuclei of communists on the Bolshevik

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

pattern was reaching a deadend and only weakening the workers' movement. Zinoviev exclaimed at the Third Congress of the Communist International: "In no case can we have another split in the ranks of the German Communist Party."<sup>14</sup>

The British and American parties were warned that it was a "matter of life and death not to remain a sect".<sup>15</sup> The Congress resolution on the subject said: "The first of the tasks of the English Communist party is to become a mass party."<sup>16</sup> Trotsky at the subsequent Congress referred back and said: "At the third Congress the overwhelming majority called to order those elements in the International whose views involved the danger that the vanguard might by precipitate action be shattered against the passivity and immaturity of the working masses, and against the strength of the capitalist State. That was the greatest danger.... In so far as there was a retreat, it ran parallel with the economic retreat in Russia."<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, large, revolutionary, mass parties now became the emphasis of the Third Comintern Congress. Redek proclaimed: "First and foremost, to the masses, by

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14 Carr, op. cit., from the German "Protokoll des III Kongresses....", p. 387.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 J. Degras, op. cit., p. 225.

all means".<sup>18</sup>

But Roy, straining to put his theoretical assimilation of the Russian revolution immediately into practice in India, let these portentous changes pass unnoticed.

When the fourth Comintern Congress began in October 1922, Communist parties representing most of the Asian countries arrived for discussions. Roy, of course, was the sole representative of India. Most of these parties were illegal organizations and hardly any one could claim membership beyond a few hundred.<sup>19</sup>

To the sweeping generalizations Roy had made at the second Congress on the impotency of the European revolution without the overthrow of capitalism in the east, Lenin could only reply "comrade Roy went too far, ... the views of the Comrade Roy were largely unsubstantiated".<sup>20</sup>

Now at the Fourth Congress Roy seemed to have acquired greater credibility. While capitalism appeared to have made a recovery,<sup>21</sup> in the west, widespread unrest was manifesting itself in Asia. Roy's assessment of the colonial bourgeoisie as compromising because of its discovery that it was "more

18 Carr, op. cit., p. 389.

19 Ibid., p. 473.

20 C. Adhikari, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 163.

21 Regardless of whether you termed this recovery a part of the prolonged death agony of capitalism, as the Third Congress thesis on the tasks of the Comintern did.



convenient for its development to have imperialist protection"<sup>22</sup> seemed to have convinced the Comintern. And his determination to immediately create a Communist Party in India was strengthened when Zinoviev, and after him Safarev, encouragingly repeated that old refrain "In 1883, the group for 'Emancipation of Labour' in Russia was also only a small one...."<sup>23</sup> In fact Zinoviev overdid his approval when in the context of the successes of the working class movements he declared that "in India we have successes to record".<sup>24</sup>

The numerical insignificance of Communists in India therefore could hardly ruffle Roy's optimism and confidence. In this context the remarks and points made by Lenin at the previous Congress afford a striking comparison. "Principles" he said, "are not an aim, a programme, a tactic or a theory. Tactics and theory are not principles. The principles of Communism consist in the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat...but are not its aim."<sup>25</sup> And what was the aim in this context? To take "into their hands the virtual leadership of the majority of the working class".<sup>26</sup> By what

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<sup>22</sup> Report on the Eastern Question by Roy (India) under Documents of the Fourth Congress. G. Adhikari, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 537.

<sup>23</sup> Imprecorr, vol. II, no. 99.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., no. 100.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

methods and means this leadership was to be acquired was a question of conjuncture, balance of social and class forces and the peculiarities of a country's historical situation. This was pointedly clear when Lenin continued in the same speech to say: "Terracini says that we were victorious in Russia although the party was very small....Comrade Terracini has understood very little of the Russian revolution. In Russia we were a small party, but we had with us in addition the majority of the Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country. Do you have anything of the sort? We had with us almost half the army, which then numbered at least ten million men. Do you really have the majority of the army behind you? Show me such a country! If these views of Comrade Terracini are shared by three other delegations then something is wrong in the International."<sup>27</sup>

The point that is being made is that conjunctural questions cannot be decided on the basis of abstract theoretical comparisons. Similarly, if a Communist party can start in a certain space and time as a small sect and progressively develop after that, in another conjuncture such a beginning could be fatal to its growth.

Another example of how theoretical principles were not immediate aims and would not necessarily determine the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 471.

means towards achieving them was provided by Lenin. He said: "We were victorious (in Russia) because the vast mass of the peasants were revolutionarily disposed against the big landowners."<sup>28</sup> But did that imply putting forward a Bolshevik programme immediately against the Socialist-Revolutionaries who "were a big peasant party in November 1917"?<sup>29</sup> According to Roy's schema, there would be nothing to prevent that, for were not the masses "revolutionarily disposed"? All that would be required was to expose and condemn the SRs, put forward a revolutionary programme before the masses and the latter would automatically follow the leadership of a 'scientific' party representing their 'true' interests. Lenin however had his own method of translating abstract principles into realisable aims. He said: "In August and September 1917 we said: Theoretically we are fighting the Socialist-Revolutionaries as we did before, but practically we are ready to accept their programme because only we are able to put it into effect."<sup>30</sup> We did just what we said. (And) the peasantry ill-disposed towards us in November 1917, after our victory, who sent a majority of Socialist-Revolutionaries into the Constituent Assembly, were won over by us...."

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28 Ibid., p. 473.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 474.

Clearly, Lenin's approach towards practically working out theoretical positions was fundamentally a conjunctural one underlining various specificities within it. Keeping this in mind let us go back to examining the Fourth Comintern Congress.

Within the Lenin-Roy problematic the struggle of the colonial peoples had accumulated significant experiences in the two and a half years since the Second Congress. These experiences were presented to the Fourth Congress for analysis in order to draw conclusions for future struggle.

The Turkish experience was the most contradictory one. The Soviet-Turkish treaty of March 1921 had been followed by a treaty between Turkey and the Ukraine in January 1922. In a telegram to the Ninth All-Russian Congress of Soviets in December 1921, Kemal, the nationalist leader of Turkey, expressed his belief in "the profound mutual sympathies of our friendly nations" and in the "valuable solidarity of our two countries".<sup>31</sup>

In spite of friendly ties with the Soviet Union the Turkish Communist Party had been banned and intensely persecuted in a systematic manner. The Turkish delegate to the Fourth Congress complained that though the Turkish party had supported its government in its struggle against imperialism, in

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31 Carr, op. cit., p. 469 from Russian sources.

accordance with the resolution of the Second Congress, the government had started a campaign of repression against the communists. He proposed a vote of protest which was unanimously adopted.<sup>32</sup>

Malacca, the delegate from Java, informed the Congress that until they quarrelled in 1921, the Javanese Communists numbering 13,000 had worked with the Muslim national association, Sarekat Islam, which was founded in 1912. They had not only persuaded them (the Sarekat) to adopt Communist slogans but had also won over some of its followers.<sup>33</sup>

Speaking on behalf of his party, he felt that collaboration had not been carried far enough and denunciations of pan-Islamism at the Second Congress had damaged their cause.<sup>34</sup> He bluntly confronted the Fourth Congress with the question whether or not the policy of the united anti-imperialist front implied support for "the war of liberation of the very aggressive, very active 250 millions of Muslims under the imperialist powers?"<sup>35</sup>

The Chinese delegate, Lin Yen-chin, said in the course of discussion that "on the assumption that the anti-imperialist united front is necessary to get rid of imperialism

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32 Ibid., p. 474.

33 J. Degras, op. cit., p. 382.

34 Ibid.

35 Carr, op. cit., p. 475.

in China, our party has decided to form a national front with the national revolutionary party of the Kuomintang. Members of the Communist party joined the Kuomintang as individuals....If we do not enter this party we shall remain isolated, preaching a communism which is, it is true, a great and sublime ideal, but which the masses do not follow....<sup>36</sup>

As for the question of the mode of alliance between the KMT and CCP was concerned, Sun Yat-sen, the Chinese nationalist leader, had suggested that while the Communists could retain the identity of their organization, they could also become individual members of the larger organization of the Kuomintang. Mering, the Dutch Communist who was a member of the E.C.C.I, and who had participated actively in the discussion of the national and colonial question at the Second Congress, advised the Chinese Communists to accept Sun's offer.<sup>37</sup>

While the Chinese and Indonesian national experiences seemed to substantiate Lenin's position on the attitude of Communists towards their national liberation movements, the Turkish experience seemed to corroborate Roy's assertions on the counter-revolutionary nature of the bourgeois leaderships of the national movements.

A study of the Theses on the eastern question adopted by the Fourth Congress of the Communist International

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36 J. Degras, op. cit., p. 383.

37 Carr, op. cit., p. 527.

reveals almost conscious evasion of a detailed study of these experiences.<sup>38</sup>

Even a direct question like Malacata, which was addressed to the Russian delegates Zinoviev and Hadek, received no answer. Instead of analysing the Turkish experience and drawing the relevant lessons from it, Hadek advised the Turkish party, "your first task, as soon as you have organized yourself as a separate party, is to support the movement for national freedom in Turkey".<sup>39</sup>

This was a positive contradiction of the attitude advocated at the first Congress of the Toilers of the East in 1922, which had declared the policy must be "to support every national-revolutionary movement, but support it only so far as it is not directed against the proletarian movement". The question of the modus operandi of the alliance between Communist parties and national liberation movements which Lenin had left to be worked out by the Communist parties concerned, was now actually being evolved in China according to its delegates. The Fourth Congress did not make any attempt to evaluate the Chinese experience and draw conclusions from it. Instead Safarov, glossing over the issue, remarked that "These peasant masses must be won over

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38 Though it was at this very Congress that Lenin was exhorting "Russian and foreign comrades alike, to sit down and study." Collected Works, vol. 33, p. 431.

39 Carr, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

to the side of the revolution. The Chinese labour movement is just learning to walk. We are not building any castles in the air for the near future, we do not expect the Chinese working class to take the commanding position which the Japanese are able to gain in the near future."<sup>40</sup>

In fact, when the Chinese delegate to the Fourth Congress announced that the purpose of alliance with the K.M.T. was to "rally the masses round us and split the Kuomintang party",<sup>41</sup> Badek accused the Chinese party of having "shut themselves up in their rooms and studied Marx and Lenin as they once studied Confucius". He informed the Chinese that "neither socialism nor a Soviet republic is now on the agenda". The task of the party was "to regulate its relations with the...struggle against European and Asiatic imperialism".<sup>42</sup>

Roy, making a valid remark at the Congress, pointed out that since the Second Congress, the Comintern had realised that different kinds of action was required in different countries.<sup>43</sup> This would logically suggest that the experiences of different countries would be examined, analysed and distilled into the Congress formulations. But apparently

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40 Carr, op. cit., p. 520.

41 J. Degras, op. cit., p. 333.

42 Carr, op. cit., p. 523.

43 J. Degras, op. cit., p. 332.



without making such an attempt, Roy reiterated his earlier position taken at the Second Congress while the Russian delegates repeated the formulations Lenin had made at the Second Congress, also without concretely discussing the experiences of individual countries.

Badek simply chided the Asian delegates for their undue optimism and informed them that the Second Congress theses which spoke of support for the movements in the East did not refer to class struggles.<sup>44</sup>

Roy, agreeing with the Russian members (as he had agreed with Lenin) on the general principle of supporting the bourgeois national movements in the colonies submitted that the support should not be "unconditional, and that particular historical reasons should be taken into consideration".<sup>45</sup>

The criterion for considering a bourgeois national movement revolutionary was defined by Roy as follows: "The bourgeoisie becomes a revolutionary factor when it raises the standard of revolt, against backward, antiquated forms of society - that is, when the struggle is fundamentally against the feudal order, the bourgeoisie leading the people. Then the bourgeoisie is the vanguard of the revolution."<sup>46</sup> Here Roy uses 'bourgeoisie' and 'bourgeois national movement' synonymously.

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44 Ibid., p. 383.

45 Achikari, op. cit., p. 539.

46 Ibid.

Lenin on the other hand had given a clear definition of what he considered a "revolutionary national movement". In introducing Roy's theses he commented: "We, as Communists should and will support bourgeois liberation movements in the colonies only when they are genuinely revolutionary, and when their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organizing in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the masses of the exploited."<sup>47</sup>

For Lenin it thus becomes clear that the 'revolutionary' role of the bourgeois led movements is to be derived primarily from their desire and determination to conduct the anti-imperialist struggle. Roy on the other hand advanced the struggle against feudalism as the sole criterion for considering a bourgeois national movement revolutionary.

This cross-positioning of Lenin and Roy is almost identical with their 'debate' at the Second Congress. Roy at that time had asserted that "the bourgeoisie even in the most advanced colonial countries like India, as a class was not economically and culturally differentiated from the feudal social order....The role of Gandhi was the crucial point of difference. I maintained that as a religious and cultural revivalist, he was bound to be a reactionary socially; however revolutionary he might appear politically".<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 31, p. 242.

<sup>48</sup> Roy, Memoirs, p. 379.

Lenin on the other hand, according to Roy himself "believed that as the inspirer and leader of a mass movement he was a revolutionary".<sup>49</sup> For Roy this 'controversy' continued unresolved up to the Fourth Congress, as he felt that "two years ago we did not think of this problem so clearly".<sup>50</sup>

The Fourth Congress was faced with a contradiction from which it did not break through. On the one hand it accepted Roy's evaluation of the colonial bourgeoisie as essentially compromising in nature, while on the other, starting from Lenin's understanding of national liberation movements and their great value to the world-wide anti-imperialist struggle, the Fourth Congress made the point that even the feudal aristocracy in some areas might be collaborated with. As the Congress noted: "where feudal-patriarchal relations are not sufficiently disintegrated to separate the indigenous aristocracy completely from the masses...the representatives of these upper strata come forward as active leaders in the struggle against imperialist oppression."<sup>51</sup>

The documents of the Fourth Congress present an extremely confused picture at first reading, a point on

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49 Ibid.

50 Adhikari, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 542.

51 J. Degras, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 335.

which most historians agree.<sup>52</sup> They reflect the diversity of problems which had cropped up, but do not explore the means of solving them.

The fundamental reason for this evasiveness seems to lie in the fact that the Fourth Congress was directly confronted with the necessity of choosing between the International struggle or specific national struggles, and declaring the priority of one or the other. This choice of priorities was not confronted in 1920 at the Second Congress when world revolution had been on the agenda. Lenin had positively interpreted the conjuncture as one of imminent world revolution for "The world political situation has now placed the proletarian dictatorship on the order of the day, and all events in world politics are necessarily concentrated on one central point, the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Russian Soviet Republic...."<sup>53</sup>

By 1922, however, the conjuncture had shifted. At the Fourth Congress the retreat was declared by Lenin himself. "Even from the practical point of view", said Lenin, "all the parties which are preparing to pass to the direct onslaught

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52 F. Claudin, op. cit., p. 269. "The theses...were pitched on an excessively abstract plane, with general formulations that 'embrace' highly complex and diverse realities." E.H. Carr, op. cit., p. 477. "The theoretical dilemma... far from being resolved was intensified by the conclusions of the Fourth Congress."

53 J. Degras, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 141.

upon capitalism in the near future must now also think of securing for themselves the possibility of retreat".<sup>54</sup> An apparent dichotomy between theoretical expectations and conjunctural reality had emerged, which harboured a potential conflict of interests. Attention was invited to this already at the Third Congress. Sachs of the KAPD referred to an interview given by Krasin to the Rote Fahne in which the British miners' strike was said to have interfered with the execution of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement. To which Radok in his speech replied that any measure "which is a necessity from the standpoint of Soviet Russia is also a necessity from the standpoint of the world revolution".<sup>55</sup>

By the end of 1922 the unconscious process which culminated in identifying the world revolution with the slogan of 'save Soviet Russia' had begun and was even reflected, though in a very diffused form, in the Fourth Congress theses on the eastern question. Imperialism's worldwide threat was being sharply manifested in its threat to the very existence of Soviet Russia at that time. In this context the theses declared: "The necessity for the establishment of an anti-imperialist front is dictated also by the constant growth of imperialist rivalry....a fresh world war, the arena of which will be the Pacific Ocean, is inevitable unless an

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54 Ibid., p. 375.

55 Ibid., p. 225.

international revolution forestalls it."<sup>56</sup> But the international revolution which had existed as a basic premise of the Russian revolution from the beginning now assumed an increasingly urgent character in the fear that Soviet Russia was doomed and threatened. It was this dichotomy which was responsible for many contradictory strands in the Fourth Congress theses. For, on the one hand, the Communist parties of the east were told that "the working-class in the colonies and semi-colonial countries must know that only by deepening and extending the struggle against the imperialism of the Great Powers can its role as revolutionary leader be fulfilled."<sup>57</sup> And to deepen and extend the anti-imperialist struggle they "must take part in every movement that gives them access to the masses".<sup>58</sup> But sincere participation in the anti-imperialist struggle, rubbing shoulders with all movements which give access to masses was rendered rather difficult by the fact that communists already knew that "while the native bourgeoisie and bourgeois intelligentsia are the pioneers of colonial revolutionary movements, with the entry of proletarian and semi-proletarian peasant masses into these movements however the rich bourgeoisie and bourgeois landlords begin to leave

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56 Adhikari, op. cit., p. 556.

57 Ibid., p. 554.

58 Ibid.

it...."<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the "objective tasks of colonial revolutions exceed the limit of bourgeois democracy by the very fact that a decisive victory is incompatible with the domination of world imperialism".<sup>60</sup> Therefore the slogan of United anti-imperialist front, which was necessary because "the colonial revolution can be victorious and defend its gains only in conjunction with the proletarian revolution in the advanced countries",<sup>61</sup> at the same time became an instrument of exposure. For, as the theses hoped "the watch-ward of the united anti-imperialist front will facilitate the exposure of the wavering and hesitation of certain bourgeois nationalist groups in the East".<sup>62</sup> The anti-imperialist front which had been essential for Lenin in the immediate battles against world imperialism now became the "tactics" of "expedient",<sup>63</sup> which were "dictated by the prospects of a prolonged struggle against world imperialism".<sup>64</sup> As a result "to explain to the masses of the toilers the necessity for an alliance with the international proletariat and the Soviet Republics is one of

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59 Ibid., p. 553.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., p. 555.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., p. 554.

64 Ibid.

the most important tasks of the tactics of the anti-imperialist front".<sup>65</sup>

Any attempt to resolve these various formulations in a superficial manner regardless of conjunctural reality both in Europe and the colonies would further confound this apparent confusion.

As for the colonial world, implicit in Lenin's conceptions in 1920 had been the view that no conflict was envisaged between the bourgeoisie and communists of an anti-imperialist country as long as anti-imperialism was their priority. The suppression of communists in Turkey, the Shanghai massacres, and the ambivalent attitude of the Indian National Congress towards the communists in India had not appeared yet. By the Fourth Congress however one could see the possibility that contrary to the expectations of Communists, the bourgeoisie in the colonies instead of fighting the two enemies of imperialism and feudalism would fight the imperialists and the Communists. This phenomenon was difficult to analyse and resolve without allotting priority either to the national or to the international struggles. For, on the one hand, in the framework of a world-wide anti-imperialist front, the bourgeois liberation movements played a revolutionary role, while on the other hand, in the framework of the national movement it suppressed the activities of the communists and

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65 Ibid., p. 555.



denied them the independence to carry out their propaganda. This placed the Third International in a dilemma clearly reflected in Bukharin's observation at the twelfth party Congress in April 1923 that Turkey "in spite of all persecutions of communists, plays a revolutionary role, since she is a destructive instrument in relation to the imperialist system as a whole."<sup>66</sup>

Before going on to an examination of the fourth Congress theses it is necessary to point out that the theses on the eastern question were framed by delegates from the colonies, in collaboration with members of the E.C.C.I.<sup>67</sup> Lenin did not "creatively participate"<sup>68</sup> in the proceedings of the colonial commission, nor could he attend all the sessions.<sup>69</sup>

Having chosen to speak on "Five years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution", he apologized that after his lengthy illness he was not able to make a long report.<sup>70</sup> In the course of this report he remarked: "I have talked with a few of the foreign delegates and hope to discuss matters in detail...during the Congress, although I shall not take part in its proceedings, for

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66 Carr, op. cit., p. 479.

67 Degras, op. cit., p. 382.

68 G. Adhikari on the contrary claims that Roy presented the main report on the Thesis on the eastern question, which were drafted under the guidance of Lenin. Adhikari, op. cit., p. 360.

69 He could not even attend the opening session and sent written greetings. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 33, p. 417.

70 Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 33, p. 418.

unfortunately it is impossible for me to do that.<sup>71</sup>

Roy was a confident and sharp participant at the Fourth Congress. Besides, his prestige was high in the colonial commission because of his association with it since 1920. Besides, he was a member of the E.C.C.I.<sup>72</sup> Certain formulations in the theses "on the Eastern question" bear an unmistakable imprint of Roy's theoretical positions. On the other hand, the thesis also contains reformulations of Lenin's position at the Second Congress. The documents<sup>73</sup> at the same time reflect the dilemma of the Communist International in the choice of priorities referred to earlier, between the International and the national struggles, resulting in generalizations which provide no clue as to the practical activities of Communists in the future.

The theses on the Eastern question underlined a shift of emphasis from capitalism in Europe towards world imperialism. The war and post-war crisis had led to the weakening of imperialist hold over the colonies because of the "stormy growth of national revolutionary movements". On the other hand, the same reasons (i.e. war and post-war crisis) "have

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71 Ibid., p. 430.

72 J. Degras, op. cit., vol. 1, Appendix p. 466.

73 The theses on the Eastern question and For an Anti-Imperialist United Front - A Review", both in Adhikari, op. cit., vol. 1.

rendered imperialist rivalry for the colonies more acute".<sup>74</sup> Because imperialism was weakening due to intense revolutionary activity, the logical conclusion was to intensify this activity. Conversely, as imperialism was concentrating increasingly on its rivalries in the colonies, it became even more essential to support 'really revolutionary movements'. This was the ideal climate for Roy's arguments and was also the base from which the further understanding of the Comintern was developed. And yet, Lenin's formulations were continuously upheld along with Roy's, which resulted in a curious mixture of both within a single sentence. The theses acknowledged that "the growth of native productive forces in the colonies, therefore, causes an irreconcilable antagonism of interests between them and world imperialism".<sup>75</sup> But it simultaneously maintained that the anti-imperialist struggle "is no longer being led exclusively by the feudal classes and the national bourgeoisie which is preparing to compromise with imperialism".<sup>76</sup>

The theses maintained that "the main task common to all national revolutionary movements is to bring about national unity and achieve political independence". This was a

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74 Adhikari, op. cit., p. 546.

75 Ibid., p. 547.

76 Ibid., p. 546.

restatement of Lenin's premises. But the very next sentence continued that "the real and consistent solution of this depends on the extent to which the national movement in any particular country is capable of attracting to itself the toiling masses and break off all connections with the reactionary feudal elements and include in its programme the social demands of the masses".<sup>77</sup> This categorical definition of what constitutes a national revolutionary movement is specific to Roy, a definition he constantly employed in his writings from 1921 onwards. The next sentence upholds Lenin's position vis-a-vis anti-imperialism in that "the Communist International supports all national revolutionary movements against Imperialism".<sup>78</sup> But in the same breath it continues "only a consistent revolutionary line of policy based on the active support of the masses, and the unreserved break with all advocates of compromise with imperialism in the interests of maintaining class domination, can lead the oppressed masses to victory".<sup>79</sup> This was the position consistently maintained by Roy in all his theoretical interventions in the Indian movement vis-a-vis the Indian National Congress. Implicit in this position was the conviction that a strong mass

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77 Ibid., p. 548.

78 Ibid., p. 549.

79 Ibid.

movement independent of bourgeois leadership existed, which was a basic premise of Roy's view of colonies. These two parallel positions (of Lenin and Roy) put together give no clue as to how actually and concretely a given reality is to be deciphered and captured in political terms. Apparently, both acknowledgements seemed the only mature way of sifting through the complexity of a colonial situation in which, as the theses admitted "historical conditions can be expressed by most diverse classes".<sup>80</sup> And yet the only guide to devising a strategy for struggle in a specific context was claimed by all (Roy, the Third International, and Indian Communists) to be the most general formulations of Lenin on the most desirable course. And even these general formulations could not reveal their true significance except in a conjunctural understanding, that is, Lenin's reading of the then conjuncture as the 'actuality of world revolution'.

When attempts were made in the abstract political sense to reconcile the observations made by Lenin regarding the dual and contradictory nature of the bourgeoisie of colonial countries, they resulted in conflicting directions. Is it possible to create a strong, organized, independent Communist Party in the colonial countries while supporting the bourgeois liberation movements? Roy thought not, in

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 542-3.

spite of the formal lip service he rendered to Lenin's advocacy of such support. It has been clearly revealed how his basic theme at the Second Congress survived consistently in all his later writings.<sup>81</sup> Criticising this, the official version of the CPI maintains that not only was it definitely possible to create and build such a party simultaneously with support for bourgeois national movements but that this was 'the initial and earliest directive' from the Comintern towards evolving a strategy for colonial revolution.<sup>82</sup> What was to be blamed for the sectarian existence of many Communist parties in the colonies (e.g. India, China, Indonesia) were their tactics which contained "serious sectarian and reformist errors and shortcomings" in their work.<sup>83</sup> What, however, is never examined is the fact that the tactics they evolved grew out of the 'Leninist' conception of the party they sought to establish in India. Viewed from within the parameters of Lenin's experience of the Russian revolution, which was concretely embodied in his concepts of an independent party, strict organization, tactical struggle against and exposure of opponents, it became essential to demarcate the Communist party sharply from the non-working class mass represented in the anti-imperialist struggle and primarily from the national

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81 See Chapter IV of this dissertation.

82 Adhikari, op. cit., p. 159.

83 Ibid., p. 170.

bourgeoisie which controlled it. It is not therefore the tactics which created difficulties but the fact that the strategy for making revolution in the colonies was appropriated from the theoretical experience of Lenin's political leadership of the Russian revolution, and thus the tactics that emerged from it. Simultaneously they felt it necessary to uphold Lenin's observations on revolutionary national movements and the dual roles of the bourgeoisie in them. A combination of the two became their "guideline".<sup>84</sup> Within the politico-revolutionary paradigms of the Russian revolution there was no room for the strategy of colonial revolutions. This basic factor of conflicting problematics became insoluble one way or the other; whether in the form in which Roy conceived it or the CPI's later permutations and combinations. It became insoluble in the absence of a new perspective giving rise to a different theory.

Roy in his report on the eastern question to the Fourth Congress claimed that the task they were facing was "to elaborate those fundamental principles that were laid down by the Second Congress. In the preceding chapter an attempt has been made to show that one cannot derive any abstract fundamental principles from the documents of the

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84 Achikari, op. cit., p. 161. It is claimed that in Lenin's formulations can be found the "scientific guidelines for further developing the Leninist approach to the strategy and tactics of the national liberation movement in colonies and backward countries".

Second Congress and this is substantiated by the fact that after this formal continuity was declared Roy proceeded to demolish what Lenin had argued at that (second) Congress. Of course, Roy attributed his own arguments in 1922 to greater clarity than it was possible to have in 1920. Repeating the belief he had held at the Second Congress that the bourgeois nationalist movement did not express the aspirations of the general population he now concretized it in the conclusion that sooner or later the bourgeoisie was "bound to betray the movement and become a counter-revolutionary force.... Although two years ago we did not think of this problem so clearly, this tendency remained there as an objective tendency",<sup>85</sup>

Lenin had of course acknowledged this "objective tendency" but as it has been shown in the preceding chapter, his point of departure in estimating the role of the colonial bourgeoisie had been its leadership of anti-imperialist movements derived from its existing contradiction with imperialism. Lenin's conception of the worldwide character of the bourgeoisie was not theoretically abstract, but was a reflection on its real movement in the colonies and its value for the world anti-imperialist struggle. Roy on the contrary had different point of departure. For him the bourgeoisie in the colonies was bound to be counter-

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 542.



revolutionary until and unless "it raises the standard of revolt against backward, antiquated forms of society - that is, when the struggle is fundamentally against the feudal order, the bourgeoisie leading the people. Then the bourgeoisie is the vanguard (!) of the revolution".<sup>86</sup>

In the eastern countries according to Roy this was not the case for "although the bourgeoisie is leading the struggle there, it is at the same time not leading it against feudalism. It is leading the struggle against capitalism",<sup>87</sup> and precisely because the struggle was only against foreign capitalism, the colonial bourgeoisie for Roy ceased to be a revolutionary factor and thus its co-operation became unnecessary.

It would be worthwhile here to recall an amendment Lenin had made in Roy's supplementary draft thesis earlier at the Second Congress. Roy had written that "for the overthrow of Imperialism, the first step towards revolution in the colonies, the cooperation of the bourgeois nationalist element may be useful".<sup>88</sup> Lenin corrected this to read: "For the overthrow of foreign capitalism which is the first step

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 539.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

toward revolution in the colonies the cooperation of the bourgeois-nationalist revolutionary elements is useful."<sup>89</sup>

Lenin's permanent contribution in this is to base the attitude towards the bourgeoisie on its role in the anti-imperialist struggle and not on its anti-feudal role in the typical model of the French or Russian revolutions.

What is of great significance is that Roy's conclusion that the struggle of the colonial bourgeoisie against foreign capitalism was an "internecine war and as such contains the elements of compromise",<sup>90</sup> was faithfully reformulated in the thesis of the Fourth Congress.<sup>91</sup>

From this (conclusion) arose Roy's categorical conviction that "therefore the nationalist revolutionary movement in these countries...is not going to be successful under the leadership of the bourgeoisie".<sup>92</sup>

To corroborate this conviction Roy cited the example of the non-cooperation movement in India which had been brought to a standstill by the "timidity" and "hesitation" of the bourgeoisie. Thus, he logically summed up, Communist

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89 Ibid., p. 135.

90 Ibid., p. 539.

91 The thesis said: "The national bourgeoisie which is preparing to compromise with imperialism". Adhikari, op. cit., p. 546.

92 Ibid., p. 542.

parties "will assume the leadership of the national revolutionary struggle...."<sup>93</sup>

The question of how this leadership could be assumed was left untouched. The proletariat and its party could conduct a struggle with the bourgeoisie for influence over the peasant masses only when it existed as a large, organized party, given the existence of a broad national struggle which was already attracting the countryside. Hoy had acknowledged that the Communist parties in the colonies "cannot be called more than nuclei".<sup>94</sup> So the problem which Communists confronted in the colonies was how to create these large, proletarian parties. To which problem the theses of the Fourth Congress added worse confusion. They admitted that Communist parties "which are still in more or less...embryonic stage, must take part in every movement that gives them access to the masses."<sup>95</sup> This implied full participation in bourgeois-led national movements. But, at the same time they were to "conduct an energetic campaign against...bourgeois influences in the labour unions".<sup>96</sup>

These small nuclei of Communists such before they had acquired even the shape of a party were presented with

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93 Ibid., p. 543.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., p. 554.

96 Ibid.

"a two-fold task ; on the one hand to fight for the most radical solutions of the problems of bourgeois democratic revolution, directed to the conquest of political independence, and on the other to organize the workers and peasants to fight for their special class interests and to take advantage of the antagonism existing in the nationalist bourgeois democratic camp".<sup>97</sup>

These general formulations of the Fourth Congress throw no light on how strong Communist parties were to evolve in the colonies and whether it was possible for them to perform this two-fold task before or simultaneously with their growth into mass parties. Nor did Roy attempt to face this problem. Paying lip service to the slogan of the united front against imperialism he maintained nevertheless that the experience of the last two years (1921-22) had shown that the organization of this front under the leadership of bourgeois parties was impossible. The chief example he cited was the non-cooperation movement in India.<sup>98</sup> Therefore the Communist Party must lead the front.<sup>99</sup> This position presupposed a party with a strong organization and wide mass base which would make it a significant political force, and not a party in its embryonic and formative period.

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97 Ibid.

98 Ibid., p. 541.

99 Ibid., p. 543.

This preoccupation with 'leading' and 'hegemonising' the bourgeois parties persisted in the history of the CPI, a task which it could never successfully fulfil. Unless one transcends the framework of the 'party' as conceived by Lenin in the Russian revolution one cannot escape repeating ad infinitum that Communists should support bourgeois national movements but maintain independent proletarian parties thus remaining within abstraction regardless of conjuncture.

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## CHAPTER IV

### ROY AND THE INDIAN COMMUNISTS

At the Second Congress of the Comintern Roy formally accepted Lenin's position and believed he had successfully reconciled his own theories with the latter's emphasis on anti-imperialism as a valuable component of the world proletarian revolution. Yet, at no moment did he relinquish his basic premises for conducting a "truly revolutionary" struggle in India. In his Memoirs Roy records that his lectures produced in book form in Mexico under the title India's Past, Present and Future were his "first attempt to apply Marxism to the study of Indian history".<sup>1</sup> It was in continuation of this that "I resumed the attempt in 1921".<sup>2</sup> The outcome of this attempt was India in Transition which according to Roy was written specifically "to convince Lenin of the correctness of my view".<sup>3</sup> In other words Roy's already definite view of historical reality in India, which he had assertively defended at the Second Congress, did not waver for a moment as he sat down to prepare a "detailed report about the structure of the

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1 Roy, Memoirs, p. 549.

2 Ibid., p. 551.

3 Ibid., p. 552.

national economy and the class relations of contemporary India - a report which would back up my view of the nature and perspective of the Indian revolution".<sup>4</sup>

This report which was later expanded to India in Transition was studied carefully by Lenin, says Roy: "Warning me against wishful interpretation of facts... (Lenin) advised me to elaborate it in the form of a book, which would give a realistic picture of the contemporary Indian society and open up the perspective of the Indian revolution."<sup>5</sup>

Roy was convinced that his analysis of contemporary Indian society was penetrating and accurate, on the premises of which he outlined his theoretical proposition for the Indian revolution, and accordingly began his propagandist writings to convince communists in India of the same. In this context it would be worthwhile to trace Roy's positions and formulations from the Second Congress onwards.

In the course of discussion on his theses at the Second Congress, Roy, having submitted to Lenin's arguments, tried to defend the same against Serrati who launched the principal attack against them. "Naturally", said Roy, "a revolution started by the masses in that stage (i.e. not class-conscious masses; S.J.) will not be a Communist revolution, for a revolutionary nationalism will be in the foreground. But

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4 Ibid., p. 551.

5 Ibid.

at any rate this revolutionary nationalism is going to lead to the downfall of European imperialism, which would be of enormous significance for the European proletariat."<sup>6</sup>

This was a reaffirmation of Lenin's perspective. And Roy was gripped sufficiently by Lenin's arguments to declare: "Every national revolution in a backward country is a step in advance."<sup>7</sup>

Roy's article "Present Events in India", one of the earliest articles on India published in the Communist International<sup>8</sup> and his Manifesto to the Thirty-Sixth Indian National Congress, in 1921, both reflect an attempt to reconcile two essentially separate premises. [Lenin's and his own]

In the context of widespread unrest and momentous nationalist activity during the last few months of 1921, Roy referred to "a tremendous concentration of the national energy for a determined effort against the British bureaucracy".<sup>9</sup> Through the prism of Lenin's theoretical intervention at the Second Congress Roy could now see the "nationalist revolutionary movement" rising in India; see the masses being drawn into active participation, see the expressions of national solidarity

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6 Documents of the History of the CPI, vol. 1, p. 192. ed. G. Adhikari.

7 Ibid., p. 193.

8 "Present Events in India", in Communist International, no. 3, 1921.

9 Ibid.



in a national boycott of the Prince of Wales' visit to India.<sup>10</sup> Roy painted an almost eulogistic picture of the Indian revolutionary movement: "The agrarian movement, the proletarian movement and the nationalist movement are moving concertedly towards one object, national independence, under the guidance of the All-India National Congress, which is the acknowledged head today of the Indian struggle against British rule."

He even overcame his rationalist scruples on the subject of Gandhi's leadership and was prepared to see him in a positive light. "At first sight", he wrote, "Gandhi appears a mad prophet of peace and non-resistance. But closer examination of his utterances and tactics convinces one that he has deliberately chosen the only road open to Indian patriots under the present regime of force - the preaching of non-violent non-cooperation with the present government."<sup>12</sup>

Roy's enthusiasm in fact led him into highly coloured descriptions of Congress activity and influence. He wrote: "The Congress organisation has spread itself into every small village and hamlet. Volunteers and paid organizers and propagandists infect the country preaching national solidarity, resistance by non-violent methods, such as strikes and hartals to British oppression...the propaganda had done its work and

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10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

the movement was too widespread and deeply rooted to put down.<sup>13</sup>

In another place Roy gives a description of fund collections, unmindful of regional variations: "In a vigorous campaign organised throughout the length and breadth of India the Congress leaders appealed for contribution to the fund from all classes of the people. Subcommittees sprang up in every town, and no village was too small to contribute its quota."<sup>14</sup>

This was an unmitigated exaggeration. The non-cooperation movement was not a uniformly spread movement. The absence of a central recruitment policy and direction led to volunteers getting concentrated in a few provinces. The Congress was unable to raise more than small groups of paid volunteers in scattered provinces; the volunteers could not be turned into full-time, paid professional cadres. Inter-provincial coordination was weak. There is no doubt that there were anti-government outbursts in various parts of the country. However, this activity was sporadic, with no sharply defined political or strategic focus.<sup>15</sup>

Roy claimed that in Cuntur district "the people are not paying any taxes to the government" and from that he

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 The non-cooperation movement, June 1921-February 1922. Research paper presented by students of JMU, at the Indian History Congress, 1975. Bhagwan S. Joshi, Shashi Joshi, Copalan Kuttu, Indu Agnihotri and Duseop Mathon, Centre for Historical Studies.

concluded: "They are most assuredly prepared to fight the issue out."<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact, the Congress organisation was neither cohesive nor particularly efficient, so as to be capable of leading and implementing the Civil Disobedience movement even in an area as militant as Guntur. It found itself in a state of confusion and crisis, incapable of carrying through the programme even after Gandhi gave them the green signal.<sup>17</sup>

A comparison between the temper of Roy's writings in this period and that of the Congress organ, the Independent shows that the latter is far more cautious and realistic, whereas Roy indiscriminately wrote: "Equally successful has been the registration of membership on the Congress rolls of ten million names, who stand pledged to support all measures passed by that body."<sup>18</sup> The Independent on the other hand remarked: "But the mere fact that a crore of people have gotten on the Congress registers is no proof that they have faith enough in the Congress....We know the majority of the country are sympathetic towards non-cooperation, but the depth and value of this sympathy are difficult to estimate.

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16 Roy, "The Political Crisis in India", in Ingraham, vol. II, no. 29, 2 May 1922.

17 The Non-Cooperation Movement, op. cit.

18 Roy, Present Events in India, op. cit.

From time to time, tasks have been laid on the nation with a view to gauging the extent of popular support for its policy... the policy has been to bring the Congress workers in close touch with the people and of testing the reality of the influence of nationalism over them."<sup>19</sup>

Roy seemed fervent in his attempt at identifying what Lenin called, a "nationalist revolutionary movement" (as distinct from bourgeois democratic) in India, and pinning all hopes on it. The exaggerated tempo he attributed to the movement was perhaps responsible for his concentrated enthusiasm over it.<sup>20</sup> But both were essentially misleading. Consequently the denouement came with equal forcefulness as the Congress enacted its "betrayal" by withdrawing the movement in early 1922.

Basing himself on the great revolutionary character of the non-cooperation movement, Roy concluded the masses were politicized en masse and straining at the Gandhian leash which prevented mass militancy. He wrote that there was "an undeniable existence in India of a widespread feeling of national solidarity, of national enthusiasm and desire to end the present system of government...." That being the case, the masses were ready

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19 Ibid. (quoted from the Independent).

20 Ibid. "New leaders are being thrown on the screen of Indian public with astonishing rapidity...who respond to the growing revolutionary spirit of the masses, that pushed them ever leftward."

for a radical programme - but the Congress had no 'scientific' programme. "The great deficiency of the Congress movement today is lack of scientific understanding of the various social forces which must be dealt with."<sup>21</sup> Obviously in that case, he reasoned, his duty as a communist was to provide such a programme. The result was his Manifesto to the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress.

Roy's hopeful reading that new leaders were being thrown up rapidly was embodied in the person of C.N. Das, who, he was convinced, "did not fully share Gandhi's ideas and was sceptical about the possibilities of nonviolent non-cooperation. He might favour the alternative method of mass revolutionary struggle, if a programme of developing it was submitted for his consideration."<sup>22</sup>

Roy's Manifesto reveals rigid, simplistic notions of 'consciousness' and how to mobilise people. He did not for a moment recognise the force of an anti-imperialistic 'consciousness' which the Congress was rousing - slowly but surely. Roy declared: "The masses of the Indian people('s) ...consciousness must be aroused first of all. And the cause for which they fight must include their immediate needs. What does the man in the street need? The only aspiration

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21 Ibid.

22 H.N. Roy and M. Roy, One Year of Non-Cooperation, pp. 540-48.

of his life is to get two meals a day....The abstract doctrine of national self-determination leaves them passive...."<sup>23</sup>

Considering the fact that Roy was an 'inspired' student of Lenin and the Russian revolution, it is inexplicable why he did not remember that this 'abstract doctrine' was a major force in the oppressed areas of the Tsarist empire and the recognition of this contributed significantly to Bolshevik success. Roy's Manifesto in fact contains a near denial of the role of nationalist ideology by saying: "The cause of this awakening...is to be looked for in their (masses') age-long economic exploitation and social slavery. The mass revolt is directed against the propertied class, irrespective of nationality. It is simply deluding oneself to think that the great ferment of popular energy...is the result of the non-cooperation agitation."<sup>24</sup>

Reviewing the 'Revolt of Labour in India' at the beginning of 1922 Roy revealed his shallow or careless use of the term 'consciousness'. He wrote: "Indian labour may be illiterate...(but) they feel in every moment the lash of the exploiters. Torture and stomach pang are enough to awaken them to class-consciousness."<sup>25</sup>

From this type of understanding of class-consciousness and mass politicization flowed his 'exposure theory' - expose

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<sup>23</sup> Adhikari, op. cit., p. 344.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 350.

<sup>25</sup> Inrooer, vol. II, no. 12, 14 February 1922.

the leaders and win over the masses. In the same article quoted above, he claimed: "Mahatma Gandhi, 'professor of pacifitology' has been able to become the leading figure in India today due to the masses confidence in him. The moment he betrays them in the attainment of their political-economic and social aspirations he will at once lose his influence over them. Beneath the political agitation is concealed the weapon of labour, which will be used at the opportune moment for the emancipation of the masses." This menacing posture of "using" the weapon of labour in no way explained why the masses had confidence in Gandhi, a fact which he acknowledged.<sup>26</sup>

Roy's over eager compliments to the non-cooperation movement and Gandhi in the first place, and his baseless building up of the "revolutionary force of the people", facilitated his quick disappointment with and denunciation of the Indian National Congress. And when the potential leaders of the people like C.R. Das failed to receive his programme with open arms, he quickly swung into the tactic of 'lead the people against the leadership'. It was the easiest thing in the world to slip back from this to his original characterisation of the Indian national bourgeoisie. Roy's brief flirtation with the idea of supporting the Indian 'national revolutionary' movement begun and ended with the course of the NCC movement. Now, he reverted to his original

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

theme in the theses presented at the Second Congress of C.I. in which he had distinguished between the national bourgeois leadership and the mass movement. Even in the Manifesto where he was seeking to win over radical elements of bourgeois leadership he wrote: "The workers and peasants will continue their economic and social struggle and eventually conquer what they need. They do not need so much the leadership of the Congress but the latter's political success depends entirely on the conscious support of the masses."<sup>27</sup>

Even this attempt of Roy's to reconcile the interests of the masses with the interests of the national bourgeoisie was not free of a pedagogic temper with which he informed the Indian National Congress that the revolt of the Indian worker "could not have been against this or that government, it was against the brutal system that wanted to crush him....The spirit was soon carried to the villages by various channels and resulted in agrarian riots which today are spreading like wildfire all over the country....These are the developments of social forces generated by objective conditions. The political movement must give up the pretension of having created these forces but must bend to their action and reaction."<sup>28</sup>

Armed with this portrait of the revolutionary workers and peasants in India who "are not going to give their lives

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<sup>27</sup> Adhikari, op. cit., p. 351.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 350-51.



for abstract theories".<sup>29</sup> Roy declared that "A plan of action is, therefore, being mapped so that the real revolutionary may know how to use their forces for the inevitable social and economic revolution, which is bound up with the political revolution."<sup>30</sup>

The national bourgeoisie having shown its timidity instead of valiant struggle, with the collapse of NCO the real revolutionaries now were Indian labour. "The beginning has been made in organizing unions in every field of labour."<sup>31</sup> And just as Roy had glowingly described the NCO movement he now described the activity of the labour unions. "The strikes of the textile workers, coal-miners, dock-yard workers, tramway conductors and motormen, plantation workers and jute mill-hands have been admirably carried out in many cases, and they have used this weapon no less creditably than their comrades in Europe."<sup>32</sup>

This account of spontaneous trade union activity is then immediately confused with political awareness and class consciousness. "...labourers are taking a leading part in the political movement", and "if labour is conscious of the fact that it produces all wealth and it should dictate the methods

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29 Inprecar, vol. I, no. 18, 20 December 1921.

30 Ibid.

31 Inprecar, vol. II, no. 12, February 1922.

32 Ibid.

of distribution, then there can be no other way to establish the principle but the seizure of the control of the government. That is what the revolt of labour in India means."<sup>33</sup>

Without envisaging a gradual growth of political participation and class consciousness, Roy directly points the objective of seizure of state power.

The entire vein of Roy's articles from 1922 onwards compels one to suspect that his vision of reality in India was pre-coloured by his notions of the bourgeoisie which he had expressed in 1920. The great success of the MCC movement's boycott of the Prince of Wales' visit was interpreted by Roy in a way which was specific to his original theses. Quoting from the English Statesman of Calcutta which confessed that November 17, 1921 had seen Calcutta under Gandhi raj, Roy exclaimed: "It was not only one city or one hamlet, the entire country was under the control of Gandhi and the non-cooperation..." and from this he concluded with peculiar logic that "the real situation in India is this: the movement has passed into the hands of the common people who are the backbone of society.... It is not an exaggeration to say that the movements in India are directly and indirectly controlled by the labouring masses."<sup>34</sup> Again Roy quoted from the Amrita Bazar Patrika

33 Ibid.

34 Inprecar, vol. II, no. 21, 17 March 1922.

which had said: "...writ large on the hartal of Calcutta is - Revolution" and he confidently commented that the Indian labouring masses were awakened and "Gandhi may come and Gandhi may go, but the revolutionaries are marching on."<sup>35</sup>

This kind of analysis of the Indian movement which insisted on dividing the Indian National Movement into "bourgeois leaders" as distinct from "revolutionary masses" was an echo of Roy's original position at the Second Congress of Comintern. Once this division was reaffirmed by Roy, it was only logical to begin propagating a scientific and revolutionary programme to the rank and file of the movement and exposing the "reactionary leadership". For this purpose Roy started publishing The Vanguard of Indian Independence from Berlin. The theme basically propounded in this journal was that the bourgeoisie in the colonial countries was incapable of fulfilling its own tasks, that is, anti-imperialism and the establishment of independence. This theme had been foreshadowed in E. Roy's "The Awakening of India" where she wrote that the Indian movement's "inherent contradictions are becoming palpable even to its component parts", and raised the new slogan of "May there soon arise...a class conscious Gandhi."<sup>36</sup>

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35 Ibid.

36 Inarecor, vol. II, nos. 32-33, 5 May 1922.

The Vanguard articles explored all means to convince critics of this theme, sometimes in a moralistic, sometimes in an instructional tone. Taking for granted that the Indian National movement is a bourgeois movement, why does it not behave in a more revolutionary fashion(?) - this is the constant complaint of all Roy's writings in the Vanguard. "Struggle for national freedom is a revolutionary struggle; therefore it has to be carried on by a class which is socially revolutionary."<sup>37</sup> The bourgeoisie was counter-revolutionary for Roy on two counts: first because "The propertied class needs "law and order", a peaceful state of society, for its development. Therefore, the aristocrats as well as the thin layer of rich middle class will always be on the side of the English in the crucial moment. So it is clear that lower middle class extremism cannot and will not go very far beyond the limits set by the moderates."<sup>38</sup> This was Roy's "theoretical basis" for denying the bourgeoisie any role in an anti-imperialist struggle. The practical test he made was the formulation of a socially-revolutionary programme. In the very first issue of Vanguard he dismissed the National Congress on this practical test as unworthy of leading the national struggle. "But if a programme is set up which frankly forgoes all

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37 Vanguard, no. 3, 15 June 1922.

38 Ibid.

forward movement of the Indian society it is but logical that the advocates of such a programme are trying to obstruct the progress of the Indian people, and are therefore not capable of leading us in this great historical period of our national life. This was the case with the National Congress ever since it came under the influence of orthodox nationalism.<sup>39</sup>

The bourgeois led Indian movement was thus underserving and incapable of fighting imperialism, but no proletarian party was yet in existence. This led Roy into vague and crude comments like: "The economic forces that are awakening them (Indian masses) out of their age-long stagnation and apathy will assert themselves, and the leadership of the political movement must conform to their imperious dictates."<sup>40</sup> "The masses", Roy said, "who are the backbone of the struggle for national liberation, are learning to find their own way. Bitter experience gained in hard struggles is clarifying their vision."<sup>41</sup>

Roy's critique of the Indian bourgeoisie which for him was epitomized by the Indian National Congress led him into obvious contradictions of what he had written during his brief experiment with "supporting bourgeois led movements".

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39 Vanguard (editorial), no. 1, 15 May 1922.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

From being the "only road open to Indian patriots"<sup>42</sup> nonviolent non-cooperation now became "stupid", for "we are of the opinion that non-violent revolution is an impossibility".<sup>43</sup> But the lack of visible alternatives on the Indian scene led to the recommendation that "non-cooperation and civil disobedience, if properly wielded, are powerful weapons in the hands of a disarmed people...."<sup>44</sup> A further contradiction which emerged from this was criticism of Gandhi who "shrank from putting his brilliantly conceived tactics to proper use" and therefore betrayed the movement. But which movement was Roy speaking of? For he also asserted that a true movement did not emerge in India because of the "lack of an economic programme to win the interests and allegiance of the masses, and to make swaraj intelligible to them."<sup>45</sup>

In spite of all the "bankruptcy" of the National Congress, it remained true that it was the only political body organized nationally and that it had many leaders "who often criticized and disagreed with Gandhi". The result of this was that Roy made an attempt to give lessons in Marxism to potentially militant leaders through the columns of the Vanguard. They were warned that "To dissipate and denounce

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42 Communist International, no. 3, 1921.

43 Vanguard (editorial), no. 1, 15 May 1922.

44 Ibid., no. 3, 15 June 1922.

45 Ibid.

mass action for the sake of the interests of the respectable middle-class is the worst crime that can be committed against the freedom of the Indian people."<sup>46</sup> And do not the actions of the Congress, he asked, bring "upon its head the serious charge of having betrayed the nation for the interests of a small class of landlords and capitalists?"<sup>47</sup>

In a series of articles, Roy now began expounding the theoretical position which he had defended at the Second Congress of C.I. that - only the proletariat of the colonial countries could successfully lead the anti-imperialist struggle. "Therefore it is futile, to say the least, to rely on one agency of oppression in order to fight the other. Such tactics only confuse the masses....Those who resort consciously to such tactics want to replace national exploitation by class oppression."<sup>48</sup>

For Roy there were only two alternatives; either a militant, consistently revolutionary movement led by the National Congress willingly, or confrontation with the bourgeoisie epitomised by the Congress leadership. The Congress led non-cooperation movement did not fit the bill now that it had petered out. Post factor, Roy negated even its

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46 Vanguard, no. 5, 15 July 1922.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid. (editorial), no. 1, 15 May 1922.

briefly revolutionary role. He informed the Indian National Congress: "Contrary to your belief, it was not non-cooperation slogan that brought about a gigantic popular awakening, but it was the popular awakening that made possible the idea to organize a sweeping onslaught against the government."<sup>49</sup> This theory of the spontaneous awakening was accompanied by a banal theory of disseminating consciousness. Roy wrote: "...to develop their (workers' and peasants' - S.J.) revolutionary consciousness is the burden of our programme of action."<sup>50</sup> And how was this to be accomplished? "We must assume the leadership of the working class,...vigorous agitation should be carried on among the workers and peasants...to expose the sinister designs of the reformist labour leader."<sup>51</sup> Roy's method of creating class consciousness therefore was twofold: an independent organization of the working-masses and the exposure of class enemies. These two 'tactics' Roy had learnt from the political behaviour of the Bolshevik party in Russia, and now employed them practically regardless of the conjuncture, the correlation of class forces, and relative strength or weakness of the working class or bourgeoisie in India.

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49 Vanguard, no. 5, 15 July 1922.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.



Roy's posture on the other hand was that of a pedagogue whose own "scientific" thought was enough guarantee for upholding the class interests of the Indian workers and peasants. For, Roy reminded the Indian nationalists: "The ignorant workers and peasants do not understand political theories any more than they care for spiritual abstractions. They want to satisfy their hunger, to have the intensity and brutality of exploitation modified."<sup>52</sup> Not even the rudimentary elements of Lenin's theory of "consciousness" are reflected in such statements made by Roy.

The method of exposure - or expose - that Roy vigorously employed against the Indian National Congress was assiduously recommended to all left-wing elements in the national liberation movement. For, "the national war will be waged in India side by side with the class war. The development of the latter will strengthen the former."<sup>53</sup>

## II

Individual communists, outside the country like Roy, as well as those in India who participated in the non-cooperation movement like Dange and Chettiar, were in complete agreement over one point: that the most crucial factor

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52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., no. 9, 15 September 1922.

responsible for the failure of the national movement to arrive at its logical conclusion was the lack of a leadership or vanguard party which could have guided the mass movement uncompromisingly.

To examine the theoretico-ideological formation of the early Communists is mainly to examine the conceptions underlying the party they wanted to build as a powerful weapon to carry the anti-imperialist struggle forward. The questions concerning the nature of the mass organizations and their mutual relationships, legality or illegality, and above all attitudes towards the Indian National Congress and Communist International form inseparable aspects of the all embracing conception of the party.

Though all of them were working towards propounding this fundamental conception, their thought processes derived inspiration from different experiences and perceptions of Indian reality which provided the axis around which various ideas crystallised and were constituted. These experiences and perceptions manifested themselves in the form of unarticulated, a priori premises, which they took consciously or otherwise, as their starting point in the movement towards an overall conception of the party.

Individual communists who participated in the national movement and absorbed its experience, did not conceive of the party as the vanguard of the movement of a particular class possessed of a definite class programme, strategy and

tactics to place that class in hegemony and power as the result of a final victory of its movement. Their starting point was the need of the historically real movement produced by the anti-imperialist sentiment and activity of the masses, which they believed at a particular stage of development had been 'betrayed' by the leadership whose interests were threatened by the further development of the same movement to a new stage.

Like Roy, the communists in India also felt that what this movement needed was the involvement of the working class and peasantry in the anti-imperialist struggle on the basis of their respective economic programmes. What, however, they wanted to ensure as the result of working class and peasant activity, was that the already given struggle move to a higher stage from where it had been left stranded by the Gandhian leadership. So, their conception of the party was one which would lead the anti-imperialist struggle to a stage where it would become internally more united and powerful, drawing together all the anti-imperialist forces. Within this perspective they asked themselves these questions: can such a party be legally possible? What sort of a programme should it have to win all anti-imperialist forces? What attitude should it have towards the Congress party and the IIIrd International? What is significantly discernible in their early conceptions is that the emphasis on the umbilical

cord between the unified anti-imperialist struggle and the would be Communist party is never severed.

The predominant trend of all the speeches and writings of early Communists is that of eulogising the anti-imperialism of the Russian Workers State and the vigorous support extended to colonial revolutions by the Bolsheviki. This was the primary ideological impact of the Russian revolution which was hailed equally by the nationalists and their Press. Radical nationalists with higher levels of politicization and therefore sharper anti-imperialist attitudes went beyond this obvious manifestation of anti-imperialism and began absorbing the theoretical rationale underlying the political stand of the Communist International. The theoretical framework from within which the anti-imperialist formulations had emerged was the same which had provided the revolutionary working class ideology of the Russian revolution, that is, the attack on capitalism. Consequently, the theoretical formation of the Bolsheviki appeared to be the tested and most scientific basis for a consistently revolutionary anti-imperialist theory. To identify with one made it seem necessary to totally accept the other, to those radical elements in the Indian body politic, who were utterly disillusioned by the inconsistent, compromising Gandhian leadership. The theoretical framework of the IIIrd International not only offered a razor-edged critique of and struggle against

imperialism but significantly, also seemed to provide a historically scientific explanation for the inconsistency and compromisory character of the Indian national movement. Once the factor of a class-based understanding of social and political movements was absorbed, the logical result was the adoption of the organizational and political framework of the Bolshevik party.

This linkage has been acknowledged by Communists later as the major impetus behind their initial formation. B.T. Ranadive writes: "Lenin's ideas offered new militant paths for national struggle" specially to those "young revolutionaries who were already dissatisfied with the results of the satyagraha struggle...the longing for a revolutionary struggle against the British now got a scientific theoretical basis."<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Sajjad Zaheer comments: "Like hundreds of thousands of young Indians, I fervently believed in all that Gandhiji said. Lenin and the Russian revolution vaguely inspired us. Our national leaders, Gandhiji and Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal all praised Lenin and the Bolsheviks, for they were the first European rulers to sympathise with the Indian freedom struggle."<sup>55</sup> Significantly, Sajjad Zaheer lists all the other Asian leaders whom they admired equally. Kemal, Sun Yat Sen, Reza Shah of Iran, Amanullah

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54 Anand Gupta, ed., India and Lenin, N.M. Library.

55 Ibid.

of Afghanistan and Zaghoul Pasha of Egypt, all of whom appreciated Russia's denunciation of imperialism and help and sympathy for the East. As he puts it concisely: "Lenin and Communism now became associated in my mind with uncompromising anti-imperialism."<sup>56</sup> And in the political background was the failure of the non-cooperation movement, generating a mood of frustration and depression among Indian youth, and the constant question: was there no way out? Suddenly, the Kanpur conspiracy case hit the headlines and "a clear view of the followers of Lenin began to emerge before our eyes".<sup>57</sup>

The Kanpur conspiracy case brought the early communist groups into the public eye, and four men emerged as the leaders of this infant movement - Dange, Singaravelu, Muzaffar Ahmed and Shaukat Usmani. Shaukat Usmani, having received training at Moscow was one of the "boys" sent to India by M.N. Roy.<sup>58</sup> Muzaffar Ahmed was a 'direct contact' of Roy's through Malini Das Gupta.<sup>59</sup> Both, Usmani and Muzaffar Ahmed mainly carried out Roy's instructions regarding organization, distribution of literature, propaganda etc. In an interview Muzaffar

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56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Kanpur Conspiracy Case, exhibit; letter from Roy to Dange dated 25 December 1922, available in Documents of History of CPI, ed. Adhikari.

59 Muzaffar Ahmed, interview by P.C. Joshi, Archives of Contemporary History, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Ahmed gave to P.C. Joshi<sup>60</sup> he traced his early political activities and gave the following facts which speak for themselves.

Around the middle of 1920 he got together with Qazi Nazrul Islam and started a daily paper. "The Bengali papers during these days were very sentimental and wrote in a very romantic style. We were also like that."

The first two books he read "on the subject of communism" were Lenin's pamphlet Will the Bolsheviks maintain Power, and People's Marx in 1921.

"While running the paper I decided to do politics and give up literature. Whether to join Congress or Khilafat I could not decide. I attended the meetings of both. I was a mere onlooker then."

The meeting with Malini Gupta, whom Roy had sent to contact willing workers in India, took place in 1921. "We decided to work together. I was to keep direct contact with Roy and pass the literature to various people."

"Vanguard and Inarecor came regularly to Bengal. My main job was to distribute them. I sent abroad the addresses of all persons who did any political work - Congress or terrorist. All the C.I. stuff began coming to them direct. I also mailed Vanguard to all AICC members and dropped literature in mail boxes of important political persons."

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60 Interview with Musaffar Ahmed, by P.C. Joshi, Calcutta, 1947. Bound Volume (typed) available in A.C.H., JNU.

"In 1922 we had the problem which are the books to read. In Vanguard I saw Philipp Brice's My Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution, and got the book and read it in 1922. Before this I did not know anything on party organization - this book gave the organisational structure of the Bolshevik party. I got my understanding from there."

"In the Middle of 1922 Kazi Nazrul started Dhumketu. I was not much educated in politics,<sup>61</sup> but I told him: Your appeal is going to terrorists. You are not writing on and for the masses."

"Malini Gupta had told me that he had come to India as representative of C.I. on a definite mission and that C.I.'s intention was to see that people's government was established in every country, and they would be prepared to render necessary help to any country in this attempt. The nature of help would be advice and monetary help and C.I. was receiving funds for this purpose from Soviet Russia and other countries. As to programme of work etc., Malini could give me no clear idea as he had no conception."

"When Usmani met me in 1923 - we decided to work together according to the programme and instructions of the C.I. Our main complaint was that M.N. Roy was not sending money."

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61 Emphasis mine (S.J.)



"We had very little to do with workers. Distribution of literature was our main work."<sup>62</sup>

Muzaffar Ahmed was obviously distributing literature and propagating Roy's ideas to the middle-class youth in Bengal. In a letter to Roy he wrote: "It is the unalloyed truth that the Communistic principle does not appeal even to the very patriotic Hindus. It is no easy thing to break up instincts of many thousand years. But our hope is that we shall be able to win over the new generation easily."<sup>63</sup>

That Roy was not satisfied with Muzaffar Ahmed's political or theoretical understanding is obvious in a letter Roy wrote to him on 22 February 1923: "You are not able to understand even today what I say, therefore an attempt will have to be made to convene a conference here as early as possible."<sup>64</sup>

An example of the quality of Muzaffar Ahmed's work in Bengal is provided by the fact that though he won over many terrorists into joining his communist group, they all went back to terrorism after he was arrested in the Kanpur conspiracy case. On being asked why they returned to their

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62 All the extracts quoted above are from the Interview with Muzaffar Ahmed, op. cit.

63 Letter. Muzaffar to Roy, dated 15 February 1923. Kanpur Conspiracy case exhibit.

64 Letter. Roy to Muzaffar, dated 22 February 1923, Kanpur Conspiracy case, exhibit.

former activities he replied; "I cannot explain why they went back to terrorism."<sup>65</sup>

As for Shaukat Usmani, the "boy" Roy had sent to India, the only evidence of his thoughts is in his correspondence with Roy which was exhibited at the Kanpur case proceedings. On the one hand Usmani's letters show that they had absolutely no organization in India and that hardly anything was being done. On the other hand, he echoes Roy's sentiments on the Congress and Gandhi who were rapidly getting divorced from the masses. In a letter to Roy Usmani wrote; "The masses have begun their historic struggle and are successfully overthrowing their rank-seeking and reactionary leaders....The Indians conference in London may pass resolutions and exhort the people to stick to the 'Ahimsa' of Mahatma Gandhi but the movement does not heed them. Mahatma, even if he comes out of jail today would find himself lagging far behind the movement. He may be given a cordial and superfluous reception but as soon as he reappears on the political platform there is every possibility of his being posted down. Tolstoy fell in a ditch and...hence Gandhi's fate....Government is seriously watching Allahabad, Kanpur, Benaras and Lucknow. The situation is towards mass violence."<sup>66</sup>

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65 Interview with Muzaffer Ahmed, op. cit.

66 Letter, Usmani to Roy, dated 1 February 1923.

In contrast to this successfully rising mass movement were Usmani's complaints to Roy in another letter: "Ever since my return I have been clamouring for enhanced work. But we had no adequate means at our disposal. Masses have just smelt odour of communism. Funds are necessary - but hardly any available. Also, progress is hampered by the counter-action of imperialists and counter-propaganda of the bourgeoisie which controls the Press. They send lackeys and henchmen into our organisations - who preach Kemalism and Royism. They support communists. Unmask them and you will find in them political adventurers, opportunists, and the lackeys of god capital. These plague germs must be butchered in cold blood and ruthlessly. No compromise, no mercy."

"The Intelligence department", he continued, "has become very advanced in its work. Early morning on mail day a batch of these hounds reaches every post office and letters of those suspected are opened. This is the condition everywhere in the country."<sup>67</sup>

Himself contradicting his earlier assessment of the Gandhian movement, Usmani wrote to Roy: "Reactionary and counter-revolutionary propaganda has been vigorously carried on to a successful end during these months. Ahimsa propaganda of the Gandhi school has not only destroyed the bourgeois

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67 Letter. Usmani to Roy, dated 15 February 1923.

movement, but has also impaired the spirit of the working-class."<sup>68</sup>

The main evidence in the Kanpur Case against Muzaffer Ahmed and Usmani was their correspondence, and money transactions with Roy. Both were charged with receiving Bolshevik literature and being the paid agents of Roy. As there is no evidence of any critical intellectual activity on their part, Roy's views must ipso facto be accepted as their views also.

That Roy considered them his representatives in India is apparent from the fact that all directions on linking up various groups in India, contacting emissaries and despatching money for propoganda, were addressed to them. Whereas both Dange and Singaravelu, in their own way, contributed to the realm of ideas around which their organisation was to be created. Thus, it is necessary to trace their evolution up to 1925.

Dange's debut into political writing commenced with his book Gandhi versus Lenin published towards the middle of 1921. According to Dange himself, the Communist group in Bombay came into existence around this work.<sup>69</sup>

The book begins with a quotation on the first page: Tilak's famous declaration of "war" against the

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68 Letter. Usmani to Roy, exhibit 2, Kanpur Conspiracy Case.

69 Documents of History of CPI, ed. Adhikari, vol. 1, p. 307.

British Government in 1906: "We shall not give the Government assistance to collect revenue. We shall not assist them in carrying on the administration of justice. We shall have our own courts and if time comes, we shall not pay taxes."

This was the essence of Civil Disobedience which Gandhi proposed to launch after an initial phase of non-cooperation which would mobilise and politicise people. Therefore Dange, an admirer and student of Tilak's politics, joined the non-cooperation movement enthusiastically.

Disappointment followed, however, with the fizzling out of the movement. "So I began to seek a new path. The news of the Russian revolution and the subsequent developments in the Soviet Union attracted me. Therefore I began to study the philosophy and ideology of the Russian revolution and wrote my book on Gandhi versus Lenin."<sup>70</sup> The Russian revolution was an inspiring event, yet Dange was not committed to emulating it. He wrote the book to explore the differences between the two methods: Gandhian and Leninist, and contrast their effectiveness.<sup>71</sup>

Dange's point of departure was that of militant nationalism.<sup>72</sup> While reading of the Russian revolution, he imbibed a limited amount of its theoretical premises, and

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70 Dange in Dec. of History of CPI, Adhikari, vol. 1, p. 307.

71 Dange, A.C.E., JNU, 'Foreword'.

72 Dange: "From my very young days in Nasik city, I had imbibed the traditions of militant nationalism and anti-British feelings." Statement before the Meerut Court on 13 January 1932, A.C.E., JNU.

accepted the basis of history as being that of class division and struggle.<sup>73</sup> His militant nationalism was now accompanied by an awareness of capitalism's "evil role" and the necessity to fight it. Consequently he wrote: "So we have to think of two things. How to throw off the foreign yoke? With what methods? And then how to destroy the evil of capitalism amongst us, which is making fast progress, and will double its speed when we are politically free."<sup>74</sup>

Thus Dange's anti-imperialism was given a left orientation; how to overthrow foreign imperialism while ensuring that the interests of the working masses were represented favourably and that social and political power was tilted against capitalism. This was very near the perspective of Singaravelly Chettiar, who, also in 1921 wrote an open letter to Gandhi saying that he was a humble follower in the fight for swaraj, and had given up his practice as a lawyer in response to the call for non-cooperation. But, "we want real swaraj and not mere illusions of it. It should be swaraj of the people of the people and for the people." However, capitalism was corrosive of this ideal and therefore "I believe only communism, that is to say, holding land and vital industries in common for the common use and benefits of all the workers in the country

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73 Dange, Gandhi vs. Lenin.

74 Ibid., p. 22.



will bring a real measure of contentment and independence."<sup>75</sup>

Despite this similarity of perspective with Chettiar, Dange in his book revealed an attitude which was close to Roy's. This was in the way he conceived of Bolshevism or Marxism, both terms being used synonymously. He wrote: "Bolshevism, is not, like other sciences, simply a science of politics and economics, submitting itself to changes due to criticism. A true Marxian or Bolshevik will admit of no change in the body of the theories of his faith. Bolshevism has come to acquire a force of religion, and all that inspired unflinching belief, that a religion demands."<sup>76</sup>

Adopting Bolshevism was seen not as equipping oneself with a critical attitude towards reality but like baptising oneself in a new faith, to which henceforth one had to live up to unquestioningly. Bolshevism, once it was seen as a set of immutable principles worked out as a method to explain and intervene in historical phenomena, thus became an 'eternal' science. According to this method the existing social reality

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75 W. Singaravelu, An open letter to Mahatma Gandhi. The Hindu, 24 May 1921, A.C.N., JNU, Round vol. no. c221.

76 Dange. Gandhi vs. Lenin, p. 24. In his statement before the Meerut court (pp. 2595-96) Dange said; "this book is not a Leninist work at all" and that "I wouldn't subscribe to that book today." But his conception of Marxism as an absolute system of principles methods as worked out by the Bolsheviks remained unchanged. In his statement he said; "We stand for complete application of Leninism to the Indian conditions,...attempts to separate Marxism from Leninism and contrapose them is an attempt to introduce opportunism into the Indian communist movement. For us there can be no such thing as an independent attitude...."

was to be differentiated in terms of elements which are mutually exclusive and incompatible, and not discerned within a dynamic unity of contradictory and co-existing elements.

Like Bolshevism was seen as the practice of eternal principles, so Gandhism was seen, not as a set of contradictory ideas at a particular conjuncture of Indian history, but as an eternal philosophy.<sup>77</sup> The two were seen as being not only different but in dead opposition to each other.<sup>78</sup> Approving of this conclusion of Dange's, M.N. Roy commented: "In grasping the essential conflict between these two principles, and in glimpsing in the Russian revolution a mighty prototype for all the future revolutions of this century,...Mr. Dange has proved himself a good student of history."<sup>79</sup> Wishing that the book had been titled Gandhism vs. Leninism instead, Roy felt that then "it would have done better in bringing out the idea that it is not two persons but two eternally opposed principles that stand so strikingly in conflict today in these two countries which border on each other, whose people and

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77 Dange. Gandhi vs. Lenin. "Many in India are under the impression that the principles of non-violence and religious transformation in Gandhism are due to the peculiar circumstances of India; that Gandhism advocates non-violence because violence is not possible here against the Government. Armed revolution being an impossibility, non-violence has become the order of the day. But it is a gross mistake to suppose that. p. 33.

78 Ibid., p. 30. "But the point where Bolshevism and Gandhism are deadly opposed, is that of methods to work out the revolution in society."

79 Roy. "The Vanguard", no. 8, 1 September 1922, A.C.H., JNU.



problems are so similar but which form the antithesis of one another in the present revolutionary crisis." As regards Bolshevism, Roy, attacking Chettiar's comment that Bolshevism was the product of the peculiarity of Russia declared: "These principles of Bolshevism...were laid down by Marx and Engels in Communist Manifesto. So, the fundamental principles of Bolshevism are identical with the cardinal principles of Communism, that is, Marxist socialism."<sup>80</sup>

This was the attitude towards Gandhism on the one hand, and Bolshevism on the other, which was common to Dange and Roy. Though Roy had already committed himself to Bolshevism, whereas Dange "flinches from...an armed conflict, that is revolution."<sup>81</sup> But this, said Roy, was because "his theoretical development is still incomplete, his ideas are still confused."<sup>82</sup>

Dange, while full of admiration for the Bolsheviks' struggle in Russia, was not at the outset convinced of the necessity or practicability of reproducing it in India. Rooted in the conditions then prevailing in India, conscious of the need to first revolutionise the intelligentsia,<sup>83</sup> he

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80 The Masses of India (Paris), vol. II, no. 3.

81 The Vanguard, no. 8, 1 September 1922.

82 Ibid.

83 Socialist, 12 August 1922. Article on "Khadi, the Middle-man and the Mill-owner". In this Dange suggested "a scheme to check mill-owners profits and help Congress activities." This experiment he said "would result in many advantages" for the Congress.

accepted the Gandhian methods of struggle. Consequently, he made an attempt to synthesise them by proposing the involvement of the working and peasant masses as a lesson learnt from the Russian revolution, within the Indian struggle which was to be carried out by means of Gandhian methods.

Thus, in his premises Dange stood closer to M.N. Roy, but in his reflections on the Indian movement and conditions, his political conclusions greatly overlapped with Singaravelu's conceptions.

Dange and Singaravelu accepted non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience as instruments/forms of struggle, but attempted to give them a left orientation. In Gandhi vs. Lenin, as in the columns of the Socialist, Dange's entire approach was to reveal the inadequacy of the struggle not because of faulty methods but because labour and peasantry were insufficiently involved. Likewise Singaravelu in his "Open Letter to Mahatma Gandhi" wrote: "Your advice to Kisans in the last number of Young India is deeply disappointing. When we can make use of non-violent non-cooperation against the political autocracy, I fail to see why we should not use the same against capitalistic autocracy? We cannot fight against the one without fighting against the other."<sup>84</sup>

A significant factor common to Dange and Singaravelu at this point was their conception of communism as state

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84 Op. cit.

ownership, and absolutely no notion of the nature of the State.

It was at this juncture that Roy decided to take them into hand and guide their activities. As a first step he sent his programme for the Gaya Congress to Singaravelu, asking him to present it and assuring him: "...His will hold out the things that are needed and understood by the ignorant hungry workers....Thus the Congress will be left without any dynamic following."<sup>85</sup> "The clause on Boycott", Roy wrote to Singaravelu, "was excluded from our programme... advisedly. Our attitude towards this petty bourgeois method of fight should be a negative support, i.e. we will not sabotage it...."<sup>86</sup>

Singarvelu, however, in his speech supporting the resolution on "Labour Organization" at Gaya, reiterated his support for the Gandhian methods of struggle for swaraj. He said: "I have the greatest faith in that method. That method has been disputed by our fellow communists abroad. I told them that we have adopted this method as a practical necessity and that I believed in that method."<sup>87</sup>

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85 Roy to Singaravelu, letter dated 12 November 1922. A.C.F., JNU. An interesting remark Roy makes in this letter is that the IV International Congress is going on and "it is fine to feel oneself a part of the biggest force in the world, a force that is making history. I solve the problem of India through this big world standpoint, so am very optimistic.

86 Roy to Singaravelu, letter dated 9 November 1922, A.C.F., JNU.

87 Singaravelu's speech in support of Labour resolution in Documents of History of CPI, vol. I, ed. Adhikari.

But, while reaffirming his faith in non-cooperation, Singaravelu made an immense effort to orientate the thinking of Congressmen towards labour organization and distributed a leaflet called the 'War Manifesto'. As he had written to Roy, "Now, we Congressmen and non-cooperators have come to the cross roads, and are preparing for the Surat Congress at Gaya. There the Great Tilak was the master, but at Gaya who is to lead? I am going to declare this war in our own camp...."<sup>38</sup>

What brought Roy, Dange and Singaravelu together was their belief of having arrived at the cross-roads and the consequent need to create a new organization to lead the struggle. As Singaravelu wrote to Roy: "We have been following your articles in Vanguard etc. I am preparing a New Manifesto embodying your ideas and mine."<sup>39</sup> As a beginning, he continued, he planned to form a small 'party' within the Congress based on: "(1) The immediate goal of winning swaraj; (2) The method of struggle would be non-cooperation; (3) Labour organised and unorganised, to be affiliated to the Congress; (4) Labour to be trained for a national strike; (5) Training of volunteers for propaganda and civil disobedience; (6) To raise a loan to meet the expenses of the campaign (repayable

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38 Singaravelu to Roy, letter dated 23 November 1922, A.C.N., JMU.

39 Ibid.

after swaraj; the interest however would be paid through the Tilak swaraj fund); (7) To concentrate on the paralysing the bureaucracy wherever possible and that end that alone (emphasis in original); (8) To give a call to students to enlist as volunteers; and (9) Boycott."<sup>90</sup>

This 'plan' that Singaravelu communicated to Roy was in essence what Roy had been calling for: a small attempt to radicalize the Congress. But for Roy this attempt was bound to fail and it was only a matter of calling the bluff.<sup>91</sup> As Roy wrote: "Today the country is ringing with the cry 'to the masses'. Some of the leaders go so far as to declare that the middle classes are not capable of carrying the non-cooperation movement to its logical conclusion. All this is very encouraging; but the leopard does not change its spots. With all its desire to enlist the support of the masses, and with all its virtuous schemes of uplifting the downtrodden, the Congress as a body will remain a bourgeois political organ. It will never be able to lead the workers and peasants in the revolutionary struggle for national freedom. Hence the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> There are innumerable instances of this attitude throughout his writings. For instance in his letter to Dange dated 2 November 1922, Roy wrote: "This programme (Gaya programme) will not be accepted by the Congress." But in the very effort to popularise it "we will be on the high road towards the organization of a communist or socialist party, which will not be a small sect - but a great political force because it will have at its disposal the legal apparatus of a mass party preparing to capture the leadership of the Congress."

talk about the "masses" warrants the appearance of the Communist Party as a factor in the national struggle....It is only under the banner of the Communist Party that the masses can be organized and led into the national struggle as the first stage of a great revolutionary movement for liberation."<sup>92</sup>

From the above it is apparent that any verbal soft-pedalling of political ideas that Roy indulged in, in his talks with Singaravelu was because of his hope of winning him over. Of course the best method of asserting the supremacy of his ideas on the communists in India was to meet them in Europe and use the backing of the International Congress to convince them. Thus, he made all efforts to convene a conference in Europe repeatedly writing to Dange, Singaravelu and Musaffar Ahmed to make the trip.<sup>93</sup>

To Singaravelu he wrote: "You agree with the idea of forming a party but argue that we have a lot of preparatory work to do. Perfectly right - so to discuss this work precisely a conference is needed."<sup>94</sup> Rather naively for a man as sophisticated as Roy, he impressed upon Singaravelu: "I suppose you do not underestimate the value of holding counsel with the leaders of World Revolution about the

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92 Vanguard (editorial), vol. 2, no. 1, 15 February 1923.

93 Roy to Singaravelu, Dange, Musaffar - individual letters produced as exhibits at Kanpur Conspiracy Case. A.C.N., JNU.

94 Roy to Singaravelu, letter dated 6 January 1923.

movement in India."<sup>95</sup>

What Singaravelu spoke of as preparatory work was the very elementary task of getting a group of like-minded people together. As he said in his letter to Roy, there were not enough persons to even do "the preparatory work of getting sympathisers together", and that it would be "useless" to come to any conference.<sup>96</sup> Complaining about his labour colleagues in Madras, Singaravelu said that one was "a fuxy - ask him about going to Moscow, he trembles"; another was "a coward". The Madras city labour numbered over 20,000 workers - but "not a single union in the city is in working order." Calling it a "hopeless struggle" Singaravelu wrote, "when I write they (i.e. labour) should be reorganized and affiliated to Congress, people shrug it off."<sup>97</sup>

Writing in the same vein to M.L. Sirkar of Calcutta Singaravelu informed him: "No union in Madras is now alive - and labour of old defunct unions is mortally afraid to combine once more. A good deal of propoganda work among labour has to be done and your journal will be more valuable than Congresses. Also popularise our Labour Kisan party among Bengal workers and start provincial organization of our party."<sup>98</sup>

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95 Ibid.

96 Singaravelu to Roy, letter dated 23 November 1922.

97 Ibid.

98 Singaravelu to Mukunda Lal Sirkar, letter dated 31 December 1923.

Velayudham, Singaravelu's friend and co-worker wrote to Dange of their immense difficulties saying: "In Madras apart from Chetty (i.e., Singaravelu) and myself we are unable to find any practical sympathisers."<sup>99</sup>

Dange was immersed in problems of equal proportion. Apologising for a long-delayed reply he wrote to Velayudham: "Am busy since four months setting up a Labour Press. No one in Bombay is doing anything about Labour. Bourgeois Congressmen are hopeless."<sup>100</sup> Dange obviously shared Singaravelu's despair at the bankrupt state of the labour movement in India; linking the initial and massive task of organising and politicizing the workers with what they obviously considered later-day questions of the programme and tactics for political and social revolution, seemed to them a highly exaggerated perspective. Terming it "a mad venture for Indians to go hunting communism in European Conferences", Dange wrote to Chetty: "Moreover, there must be less talk of revolution than what Roy indulges in; when even the preliminary rights of labour are not obtained, it is a dream to talk of proletarian revolutions."<sup>101</sup>

Apparently, Singaravelu and Dange could not bridge their perceptions of Indian conditions with Roy's theoretical

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<sup>99</sup> Velayudham to Dange, letter dated 2 March 1923.

<sup>100</sup> Dange to Velayudham, letter dated 29 September 1923.

<sup>101</sup> Dange to Singaravelu, letter dated 29 January 1923.



conceptions. Just as Dange confined himself to making propaganda and beginning the task of elementary organization, so did Singaravelu conceive of the immediate tasks as propaganda and labour organization. In his letters to Roy he repeatedly made requests for help in setting up a Press for propaganda purposes. The manner in which they were conceiving their task in the midst of concrete problems is ironically revealed in the columns of the Socialist. Underneath a bulletin titled A Synopsis of Scientific Socialism which sought to answer elementary questions on Marxism ran the comment: "These bulletins will help in holding socialist study classes. These do not exist as yet, but this will avoid the kind of confusion in which the Congress has National schools without National literature. Instead of a class giving birth to Bulletins we expect Bulletins to give birth to a class".<sup>102</sup>

Roy's enthusiasm however was not dampened by the dismal pictures of unpreparedness in India that were drawn by Singaravelu and Dange. "True we have no following in the country", he wrote to Singaravelu, "but we must secure it." And how was this to be done? Roy replied: "The forces of national revolution are today scattered in confusion....We need simply hoist a flag which will appeal to the imagination of these objectively revolutionary forces, that were never

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<sup>102</sup> Socialist, ed. Dange, dated 14 October 1922, under the heading of "socialist Study Course - Bulletin No. 1".

understood by our religious non-cooperators, nor by the rational extremists of the pro-change party. So objectively speaking, we hold that our party has a following."<sup>103</sup>

Assuring Singaravelu of all help in setting up a Press, Roy concluded: "...but the conference is important to decide about the new party on new political principles and upon a revolutionary social basis - to decide about the programme and tactics of the new party. For "as Marxians we declare: 'Had there not existed the social element to form such a party, there could be no idea of forming it'."<sup>104</sup> Replying to Singaravelu's objections against including "abolition of landlordism" and "agitation" against the bourgeoisie, in the Gaya programme, Roy charged him with sharing motives with Gandhi who for the same reasons was forced "to call for the shameful retreat at Bardoli." The reasons being "the anxiety for the vested interests of the native upper class and the apprehension of losing the problematical support of rich."<sup>105</sup>

Roy's plans for holding a conference in Europe having been frustrated by Dange's and Singaravelu's reactions, he now began communicating to them through his letter what

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103 Roy to Singaravelu, letter dated 6 January 1923. (This letter was later included in Roy's booklet 'political letters', published in 1931 - with a few changes. Both documents have been consulted).

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

ought to be a revolutionary party. At this juncture, one must ascertain what each of them individually meant when they spoke of a 'new party'.

Singarvelli had launched his 'Labour and Kisan Party' on the first of May 1923. Contrary to Roy's expectations, he did not simply pick up the Gaya programme as the programme of his party. As he had written to Roy he was trying to synthesize his own ideas with Roy's ideas.<sup>106</sup>

Both Roy and Dange criticized Singarvelli's programme - but at different levels.

Dange's assessment of the situation in India at that time and his conception of the party as something different from a purely working class party are two factors very near to the conceptions underlying Singarvelli's programme. Logically therefore despite criticism of the latter, Dange joined Singarvelli's party and listed his activities as a member in the columns of the socialist.<sup>107</sup>

The basis of Dange's criticism was on Singarvelli's conceptions or lack of them, on the government and society of the future. For Dange as for Singarvelli, the term State means the government. Neither of them reveal any notion of

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106 Singarvelli to Roy, letter dated 23 November 1922.

107 socialist, dated May-June 1923, ed. Dange. Found under the heading "Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan" (Monthly Reports). There is also an insertion giving the pledge which all who desired to join the party had to sign.

'Dictatorship of the Proletariat'. But, Dange has a nebulous idea of a classless society in which private property would be abolished. However, he does not show any understanding of the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat as being a necessary precondition for the achievement of such a society.<sup>108</sup> This is evident from the programme he himself advanced under the banner of the 'Indian Socialist Labour Party' or I.S.L.P.<sup>109</sup>

Singarvella had postponed the question of private property in his programme for discussion in the future; Dange criticized this and asserted that the abolition of private property was essential to a communist society. Though Dange, unlike Roy, had no notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat, he shared the latter's ultimate goal of a classless society. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the missing link between Dange's goal of the ideal society and the extremely confused and disjointed 'programme' he put forward. In criticising Dange's programme Roy points this out: "In it the far off ideal is mixed up with what is supposed to be the "tactics" or the methods of immediate fight", and that: "No attempt has been made to formulate the demands which will correspond to the everyday necessities of the worker and

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108 Criticising Singarvella's notion of 'Labour Swaraj', which he says means a 'class swaraj' as the desired objective.

109 Socialist, ed. Dange, 16 September 1922.

peasant."<sup>110</sup>

Roy, as a matter of fact, criticized Dange's and Singaravelu's respective programmes equally trenchantly. Singaravelu's programme "was born under this evil star" of legalism and economism,<sup>111</sup> while Dange's was "incoherent and mechanical".<sup>112</sup> What was necessary was a "programme of action.... Since the Gaya Congress, we have kept before the country such a programme."<sup>113</sup>

It would be relevant here to briefly examine the respective 'Action' programmes of both Singaravelu and M.N. Roy.<sup>114</sup>

The Action Programme put forward by Roy is as follows:

- (1) To lead the rebellious poor peasantry in their struggle against the excesses of landlordism, and high rents. This task will be accomplished by organizing militant peasants' unions which will demand: (a) abolition of feudal rights and dues, repeal of the permanent settlement and talukdari system; (b) confiscation of large estates; (c)

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110 Roy, *Aftermath of Non-cooperation*, chapter XX, ACH, JNU.

111 Roy, "Should the Communist Party be a Secret Society?" *Secret Conspiracy Case*, documents, ACH, JNU.

112 Roy, *Aftermath of Non-cooperation*, op. cit.

113 Roy to Bagerhatta, letter dated 22 October 1924, ACH, JNU.

114 Both the programmes are available in *Adhikari*, op. cit.

management of the confiscated states by councils of the cultivators; (d) reduction of land rent, irrigation tax, road cess, etc.; (e) fixed tenures; (f) no ejection; (g) abolition of indirect taxation; (h) low prices; (i) annulment of all the mortgages held by the money-lenders etc.

(2) To back the demand of the peasantry by organising country-wide mass demonstrations with the slogan of "non-payment of rent and taxes".

(3) To organize mass resistance against high prices, increase of railway fare, postage, salt tax, and other indirect taxation.

(4) To struggle for the recognition of labour unions and the workers' right to strike in order to enforce their demands.

(5) To secure an eight-hour day, minimum and better housing for the industrial workers.

(6) To back up these demands by mass strikes to be developed into a general strike at every available opportunity.

(7) To support all strikes politically and financially out of the Congress fund.

(8) To agitate for the freedom of press, platform and assembly.

(9) To organize tenant's strikes against high house rents in the cities.

(10) To build up a countryside organization of national volunteers.

(11) To organize strikes of the clerks and employees in the government and commercial offices for high salaries.

(12) To organize mass demonstrations for the release of political prisoners.

The Action Programme of the Labour-Kisan party launched by Singaravelu, is divided into three sections under Labour, Peasant and Common. (He spelt out that by Kisan was meant the landless agricultural workers and poor peasants).

### Labour

(1) To devise means and methods to save the labour fighters and their families put to suffering while in discharge of their class duties.

(2) Right to form union.

(3) Recognition of right to strike as a lawful weapon in the hands of labour for their self-protection.

(4) Formation of arbitration courts to deal with labour disputes composed of labour-union representatives, capitalists and state officials or neutrals in equal number.

(5) Improved housing condition.

(6) Minimum wages guaranteeing the value of 350 lb of rice or wheat according to the custom of the provinces per month and 10 pairs of dhotis per year.

(7) State insurance against accident, old age, ill health and unemployment.

(8) Provident Fund for workers.

- (9) Privilege and casual leave with full pay similar to that of state officials.
- (10) Reduced tramway and railway fare to labour and poor किसान.
- (11) Eight hours law, 6 hours for miners and nursing women and 4 hours for children.
- (12) Free medical aid.
- (13) Four months' delivery leave with full pay.
- (14) Maternity protection.
- (15) Abolition of labour recruitment by sardars under whom they work and who take a percentage of their earnings and whose interest coincides with that of capitalists.
- (16) Adoption of labour recruitment free or through labour union.

#### Peasant

- (1) Protection against ejection.
- (2) Twenty per cent reduction on all economic rent in ryotwari settlement.
- (3) Equal standard of rent for small holders in zamindari area as in ryotwari.
- (4) Eventual abolition of permanent settlement.
- (5) Extraction by zamindars, their servants or state officials as extras, be it in cash, kind or labour, should be made punishable by law.
- (6) Protection against oppression of zamindars.



- (7) Abolition of "salami", that is large sum of cash payment extracted by the zamindars (also jennies) while transferring the land from one to other tenants.
- (8) Free irrigation.
- (9) Abolition of dowry etc.

### Common

- (1) Universal suffrage.
- (2) Easy access for the producing masses in state institutions, that is, lowering the standard of qualifications for candidature in local self-government and provincial or central government institutions. The position as official in trade unions or labour party should be considered qualification enough to sit on those bodies representing labour and kisans.
- (3) Free and compulsory education till 16th year.
- (4) Abolition of taxes like salt tax, chaukidari tax, road cess etc.
- (5) Sharing the industrial profit by labour together with the capitalists.
- (6) Establishment of cooperative credit, consumers' and marketing societies to help the needy labour and kisans by loans and supply of their material needs at cheaper rate and to gather, preserve and sell their produce in proper time and market to fetch highest price for the small producers' benefit.
- (7) Differential railway tariff to such cooperatives.

(8) Protection of untouchables by legislation giving them equal political and religious rights.

(9) Universal suffrage in Congress election.

In his immediate programme Roy has no sense of proportion and systematisation. His overheated imagination did not allow a realistic analysis of the prevailing situation in India, despite the fact that Dange and Singaravelu in their letters to him, and to each other, were constantly emphasising Roy's exaggeration of the extent to which workers were ready to be mobilised and organized. Singaravelu wrote: "Please have patience and live to learn from the progress of our movement here." After Bardoli it was "almost dead...and it may be a decade or two before the lost momentum is attained."<sup>115</sup>

In a particular situation, what clause in the programme is timely and appropriate for the degree of development of the movement, the consciousness of the masses, and their readiness to act on this, demanded a realistic and unbiased appraisal of the prevalent social reality.

Roy did not perceive the problem of bridging the gap between the masses with a given level of consciousness, and his 'scientifically' conceived programme which presupposed a higher level of consciousness. The notion of the 'inter-connected moment', of raising consciousness to a higher level

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<sup>115</sup> Letter. Singaravelu to Chettiar, dated 13 December 1933, ACH, JNU.

through progressive struggles and explanations, by linking each preceding level of consciousness with a corresponding definite demand or clause in the programme merging with the next demand at a higher level, is altogether missing from Roy's programme.

Singarveilu's Action Programme on the other hand was an absolutely minimal programme to be propagated at the initial stage. He specified that it was "a provisional programme...changeable according to the development and needs of the producing masses of the country."<sup>116</sup>

Singarveilu's programme does not reveal any conception of the class struggle and the question of hegemony in that struggle aimed towards the definite goal of working class power. It was from this point of view that Roy criticized him, for it "ignores the fact that without political power no economic change or social transformation can be realised,<sup>117</sup> i.e. he has no notion of the nature of the state to be established in India.

Singarveilu simply maintained that what was aimed at was a republic - a people's government. What kind of republic it would be, was left open as an 'algebraic formula' on the realistic premise that once certain organizations of the people emerged and evolved in their struggle they would

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116 Adhikari, op. cit., p. 113.

117 Ibid., p. 391.

throw up new institutional forms. As Singaravelu clarified in the 'General Principles of the Party': "The party reserves its programme, both political and economical, including the definition of labour swaraj for a suitable time to come and will go on working on a provisional programme as will be accepted in the Congress by its members."<sup>118</sup> For the present, "to meet the immediate needs of labour and Kisans, the party besides its programme will have an action programme expressing the current demands."<sup>119</sup>

By declaring that the republic or labour swaraj would be in the interests of workers and poor and landless peasants, Singaravelu envisaged only a relation of these classes and not a concrete political institution embodying these relations in actuality.

A significant feature of Singaravelu's programme was his attempt to absorb the Gandhian struggle in it. He declared: "This party will adopt all methods and tactics for attaining its end, including non-cooperation, passive resistance, constructive programme and civil disobedience as suited to labour and kisans, and such other ways and means for the speedy attainment of swaraj." Also: "This party has no objection to establish an entente for the attainment of national swaraj

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118 Ibid., p. 113.

119 Ibid., p. 119.

with the other parties in the Congress...in order to make the Congress a real national body."<sup>120</sup>

Singarvelli also drew special attention to the role of the police, "at present being the body outside the society though recruited from it (which) has become an engine of oppression to the majority...."<sup>121</sup>

As already indicated earlier, the point of departure for Singarvelli and Dange was the radicalisation of Congress party and politics.<sup>122</sup> Both were confronted with the task of leading and working out the programme for the movement of emancipation of vast masses. This is not to say that there was no confusion or ambiguity in some of their notions, yet they were struggling towards the necessity "for the class-conscious section of that body (i.e. labour and peasants) to organise themselves into a party...to protect their own interests."<sup>123</sup> Both Dange and Singarvelli felt the need to evolve "a programme of a party suited to our present conditions. It should be organized on the basis of the socialist movement and should have for its object the establishment of the

120 Ibid., p. 119.

121 Ibid., p. 124.

122 Dange, Socialist, 16 September 1922. "Radical minded men of the Congress are seeking for means with which to stir the nation to its very basis and prepare it for its immediate political goal."

123 Adhikari, op. cit., p. 117, vol. II.

people's state...."<sup>124</sup> Singaravelu made a concrete effort which he acknowledged as provisional. Dange on the other hand was more confused because of his partial assimilation of Marxist theory, and attempts to adjust it with his 'pragmatic' outlook on Indian reality. Roy, however, with a 'finished theory' at his fingertips gave them very little chance to grow; bombarding them in quick succession with acid criticism and pedagogical instructions.

Roy's criticism of these early efforts flowed from his basic assumption that what was essential, and had to be created, was a communist party in India. "But India stands in need of a real working-class party, which will take up the standard of national liberation abandoned by the reactionary lower-middle-class and semi-intellectuals."<sup>125</sup>

Roy asserted: "...bourgeois nationalism (which) is decidedly antagonistic to any movement calculated to affect in the least the present state of social relationships." "...repeated betrayals", he continued, "have ruined the nationalist struggle, but at the same time demonstrated the class-character of nationalism....Therefore not only for its own economic emancipation, but even for the immediate object of national freedom, the organization of an independent working class party has become essential."<sup>126</sup>

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124 Ibid., p. 164, vol. II.

125 Ibid., p. 100.

126 Ibid., p. 142.

"Why and how should a nationalist movement which is essentially a bourgeois movement be led by the Communists,"<sup>127</sup> Roy posed this pertinent question and answered it himself with irreconcilable consistency and logic - except that the logic was identical with the logic of the Russian revolution.

Roy defined the national movement as a bourgeois-democratic revolution, which would be the first stage of a socialist revolution. Looking at the Indian national movement through the spectacles of a classic bourgeois-democratic revolution, he was convinced that: "The nationalist movement is fundamentally a revolutionary struggle, not only against foreign domination but ultimately against the backward economic conditions and reactionary social institutions which retard the progress of the Indian people.... This fundamental significance of the national struggle is not understood by the majority of our nationalists."<sup>128</sup>

Reminiscent of the analysis of the peculiarity of Russia is Roy's exposition of the peculiarity of India. "Under normal conditions the bourgeoisie lead a national movement. They did it because their economic interests

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127 Ibid., p. 364.

128 Ibid., p. 364.

demand the disruption of feudalism and the economic and political institutions that go with that social stage....But clearly enough Indian nationalists are worshippers of landlordism. In other words bourgeoisie have turned traitor to their historical heritage.<sup>129</sup> [Noy seemed to be unaware of the contradiction such a statement placed him in - for either the national movement was not a purely bourgeois movement as he maintained, or it was acting in opposition to its own interests.]

The bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie having been decided on, "They must make room for those who will go into the matter voluntarily and consciously. This will be the Communists."<sup>130</sup>

With this theoretical framework Noy approached the question of the formation of a new party in India, and that this had to be a Communist party was in no doubt. "The party we propose to organise will be the conscious vanguard of the working class in its struggle, first for national and then social liberation."<sup>131</sup> But, he proposed, "in order that the communists and socialists are not isolated in small seats, and can take active and leading part in the mass struggle,...a legal apparatus for our activities is needed."<sup>132</sup> The problem

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129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid., p. 143.

132 Ibid., p. 93.



however was how to form a legal party which would be neither economistic nor legalistic, but be truly the vanguard of the working masses fighting uncompromisingly. On the one hand Roy advocated that "A revolutionary mass party has to be organized as a part of the Congress", but on the other hand "this party must be under the control and direction of our own party (Communist Party) which cannot but be illegal."<sup>133</sup>

If the party remained illegal it would not acquire access to the masses in order to become a revolutionary mass party. If on the other hand it became legal it could not pose the political question challenging institutions of state power.

In his open letter "Should the Communist Party be a Secret Society?" Roy failed to answer the straightforward question whether the Communist Party should be legal or illegal. He simply discussed the disadvantages of the two extremes.<sup>134</sup>

Favouring the organization a legal party he wrote: "A Communist party is not criminal. Let it be organized." But, he warned, "there should be no illusion. The government will demand that it be a "communist party as such", that is a party which indulges in a dream which will be realised in some distant future, and which leaves the present alone."<sup>135</sup>

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133 Ibid., vol. I, p. 595.

134 Ibid., vol. II, p. 383.

135 Ibid., p. 391.

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But on the ~~obverse~~ side, he was of the view that "illegal existence is bad; it places us under great disadvantages. But legality, which is attained at the sacrifice of our political demands, is worse; it will render us an impotent sect."<sup>136</sup>

In brief what Roy wanted was a legal communist party existing genuinely "by its own power".<sup>137</sup> How such a mass Communist party was to come into legal existence emerges from this document as a baffling question to which he could provide no answer.

Yet, something had to be done. So argued Roy, in his letters to Dange, Singaravelu and G. Hussain. "We have to work both in legal and illegal ways."<sup>138</sup>

The resolution of these two different forms of political activity was suggested by Roy in proposing the organization of a Workers' and Peasants' party which would be an open legal party. "The leadership of this party will be in the hands of us (Communist Party), but will not openly preach the Communist programme."<sup>139</sup>

Roy was confronted with the problem of creating a mass Communist party in India from the nucleus that already

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136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid., p. 283.

139 Ibid.

existed for him. [In one place he referred to "the infant Communist party" and in another he says: "This party is already in the field...."]<sup>140</sup> Only, the legal activity of Communists could help them to approach the broad masses. A working class party confronted with repressive conditions is compelled to evolve new forms of struggle to further its goal. It wants to utilise all the legal possibilities in order to supplement its illegal activity. In that case the unity between legal and illegal work is already posited in the existence of a single organization of the working class - the Communist party. In the absence of an organized working class and its party, however, any party built around a programme which is not a Communist programme would at its best be a petit-bourgeois radical party. In the first case the party would make use of existing conditions by evolving new forms of struggle while in the second case the existing political and social conditions would determine the nature of the programme to be put forward, and shape the formation of the party independently of the subjective desires of Communists.

For Roy there already existed a Communist party of all the five groups in India and himself as its representative to the Comintern, though formally the organization had not been constituted. This party, in Roy's mind, was to make use of legal and illegal methods, while for the Communists in

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\* 140 Ibid., pp. 390 and 100.

India there did not exist a CPI; and they were faced with the task of either forming a CP which would necessarily become illegal or forming a mass open party in the given conditions relying mainly on peasants and workers. It was in the latter form that they understood the creation of the workers and peasants party, and this was responsible for the later day criticism they received from the Comintern for having neglected the organization of a Communist party. The choice between legal and illegal methods was for them a choice between a mass legal party which would not be a Communist party, or a CP which could not be legal. This is apparent when Dange wrote in the columns of Lokmanya that "The goal of the Socialist Party of India is one of an open and straightforward nature. The peasants and workers must be taken hold of as a helping hand in the attainment of swaraj....The propaganda of this party is as open as that of the non-cooperation party."<sup>141</sup>

Then again in the columns of the Socialist it was clarified that "we do not favour any secret and illegal organizations. No good can come out of such attempts in the present state of our society. There is a vast ignorance about our movement all the country over and a serious attempt at the education of the intelligentsia will have to be made before we can successfully bring about any organization in the

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141 Ibid., p. 80.

country. People are not accustomed to see things historically interpreted. They cannot have therefore any consciousness of the class element in the struggle. And no organization is possible unless there is this consciousness. This historical perspective of things and incidents can only be given through a system of open propaganda and association. Only through this means can we approach the masses."<sup>142</sup>

G. Adhikari maintains that both Roy and Dange put forward the idea of a legal mass party independently of each other. But the qualitative difference between their ideas is not noted. The idea of a mass party outside the pre-given tactics of the Communist International was conceived by Singaravelu and Dange and not by Roy. For Roy the mass party could be nothing but a legal front for the Communist party whose tactics would remain within the theory of the C.I. On the other hand, Dange and Chetty were closer to each other in their conceptions of a revolutionary mass party involving the workers and peasants, which was not a working class party as the conditions for its formation were seen by both as being non-existent. Dange in his brief comment on the question of organization made this amply clear: "...some confusion of ideas amongst our socialist and communist workers in India...is caused by the tactics which the Communist Third International...has laid down. The tactics are framed by men, whose psychology has been

moulded and influenced by the highly-advanced conditions of European capital and proletarian organization. The Third International tactics presupposes an organized fighting proletariat. In India or in the East, except Japan, this element is absent to a great extent though not entirely.... But comrades here must act for themselves. The socialists in India have first to create an organized proletariat, through trade union and other activities.... In the present stage of the Indian proletariat, secret propaganda is not at all wanted. We have to speak to the masses openly and to create an ideal and organization for them. So long as the proletariat is not organized and is not in a fighting mood and so long as the foreign and native bourgeoisie is not actively obstructing this creation of an ideal, what need is there for secret activities.<sup>143</sup>

This comment made by Dange is thrust into an intellectual strait jacket by Adhikari who claims that "Dange's comment on the tactics of the Communist International is not so much a critique as a plea for their adaptation to the specific Indian conditions. It may also be a deliberate demarcation for the purpose of legality".<sup>144</sup> (sic)

Adhikari pushed Dange and his group closer to Roy by quoting Joglekar's statement that in 1924 they "decided

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143 Ibid., pp. 204-5.

144 Ibid., p. 194.

to organise...a CPI following the lines of the Communist International...."<sup>145</sup> In fact Adhikari suggests that British repression was the only reason for not forming a CP or acknowledging the Comintern link. But there is evidence to show that despite repression they did not deny all relations: "We do not think there is anything wrong in accepting any outside help for the propagation of socialism here. It is immaterial to us whether the help comes from the Third International or the Communist Party of Great Britain, we owe allegiance to none excepting our own scheme of work and we look for guidance to none but ourselves."<sup>146</sup>

The truth of the matter was that the communists in India, be it Dange or Singaravelu or Satyabhakta - all distinguished between material help and ideological guidance of Comintern, as also between 'World Communism' and Bolshevism.<sup>147</sup> It was to Roy that the formation of workers and peasants party appeared as a clever evasion of repression by a change in signboards. For Dange and Singaravelu the WPP was the product of existing conditions. Only Bagerhotta emphasized the indispensability of the Third C.I. but the CPI officially declared him to be an Intelligence informer

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145 Ibid., p. 374.

146 Ibid., p. 313.

147 Singaravelu's speech at Kanpur at First Indian Communist Conference. (2) Satyabhakta in leaflet published as reply to M.N. Roy. (3) Dange on his release from prison declared that he was not a "Bolshevik".

Roy definitely conceived of the Workers and Peasants Party only as the mass 'front' of the CPI and not as a distinct organization in itself. He thought that the WPP would be a camouflage for the activities of the CP as the government would not permit the open preaching of a communist programme. The Workers and Peasants' party was for Roy a working class party preaching a bourgeois democratic programme, and not a two class party as it later tended to become and for which it was criticised by the Comintern and ultimately disbanded.

Viewed in the light of Roy's conceptions it was but logical that Singarellu's and Dange's notions of the party would appear "very defective theoretically". As Roy remarked critically: "...nothing at all is said as to what should be the tactics of an Indian working-class party at this period of political subjugation, economic backwardness and social stagnation." They were not even presenting, said Roy, "the minimum programme for the building of a working-class party".<sup>148</sup>

On the other hand Roy wrote: "The party we propose to organize will be the conscious vanguard of the working class in its struggle, first for national and then for social liberation." This was his position in the letter that he directly addressed to the conference for organising a workers' and peasants' party.

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148 Ibid., p. 162.



Explaining the nature of the organization in detail he wrote: "while believing firmly that legal existence is indispensable for the growth of a mass party, I must urge upon you the necessity of an illegal apparatus which should be built as a parallel organization." In other words, explained Roy, "In consideration of the situation we have to work in, it may be necessary to have a dual organization."<sup>149</sup> As the Communist Party of India must control and direct this mass party it "should continue as the illegal apparatus of the legal mass party...."<sup>150</sup>

There would be no "chance of overlapping, since the two organizations will simply supplement each other's activities." Moreover, "there is absolutely no apprehension of any possible conflict, since the programme of the Workers' and Peasants' Party will be the minimum programme of the Communist Party and therefore will have the fullest adhesion of the latter."<sup>151</sup>

But the minimum programme of the Communist Party is a programme for all sections of society which can be mobilized on democratic demands. By saying that there could be no conflict between the CPI and WPP, Roy posited the idea that their organizations would be structurally identical.

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149 Ibid., pp. 150-51.

150 Ibid.

151 Ibid.

But as various sections of society would be drawn into the WPP, transforming it into a mass party, there was bound to be conflict between the democratically elected leadership of these sections and the illegal Communist organization.<sup>152</sup>

The minimum programme of a CP is essentially a programme of petit-bourgeois demands and reforms. A party launching itself exclusively on the basis of such a programme would in due course be inevitably dominated by petit-bourgeois leadership, given the absence of a strong working class movement. [If it existed there would be no need for a WPP in the first place.] As the mass base of such a party would expand, its petit-bourgeois character would become predominant, and Communists would be compelled to leave such an organization so long that they believed that only a purely communist organization was capable of taking the national struggle to a higher level. The moment the 'legal apparatus' was dominated by the radical petit-bourgeois leadership, the communists would be compelled to choose one of two alternatives: either to leave the WPP for a separate independent party, or to continue working within the organization striving to extend and deepen the mass base to the working classes and poor

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152 This was acknowledged at the Meerut Conspiracy trials. "If you deny the Comintern, you then deny the party. You create a dual party or no party. For if a more or less good party exists already, it is bound to conflict and sabotage the proletarian struggle which then becomes divided under dual leadership." Statement by Dange before the Meerut Court.

and landless peasants. Only the latter could insure their being able to steer the movement towards successive shifts to the left, keeping in view their strength within the organization.

In the emergence of these two alternatives there is no room for 'parallel' or 'dual' organisations, both being controlled by the Communists.

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## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Roy's sectarianism lay precisely in his understanding and characterization of the Indian bourgeoisie - this has become a maxim for all Marxists writing the history of the CPI.

The role played by the Indian bourgeoisie from 1920 onwards was neither static nor predestined. However, observation of this role with mere hindsight does not qualify one to characterize Roy as a sectarian. A historian must needs go deeper to explore those factors which enabled the Indian bourgeoisie to realise its limited revolutionary potential.

The characterization of a social class such as the bourgeoisie and its role in the revolutionary process is always a dynamic one. Any Marxist conception about its role in a complex structure of interlocked social forces presupposes the intervention of other revolutionary classes. At a particular historical moment if from these juxtaposed forces a revolutionary class such as the proletariat fails to intervene in the historical process it leaves a political vacuum to be filled by other classes with their own, otherwise

limited, revolutionary potential.<sup>1</sup> The later historical evolution of these classes does not necessarily invalidate their initial characterisation.

All this is not to say that Roy was not a sectarian. But wherein lay his sectarianism? It arose from his incapacity to correctly see and assess the consciousness and real strength of the objectively revolutionary masses of India, vis-a-vis the politically more active middle classes. And it also lay in his failure to evolve new methods, organization and tactics to raise the masses to the level of consciousness where they could have accepted his scientific programme.

The first link up between a revolutionary party and the masses must be determined empirically. What is crucial at this point is to correctly assess the current concerns of the masses or the issues on which they are prepared to go into action - even if they are of a quite limited nature. A revolutionary party must engage in the immediate struggles if it is to escape becoming an impotent sect. Roy proved incapable

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1 Nicos Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes (New Left Books and Sheed and Ward, London, 1973).

"Class interests, as limits of extension of a specific class practice, are displaced according to the interests of the other classes present. We are dealing always with relations... the extent or degree to which a class practice actually covers the ground outlined by its class interests also depends on the extent or degree to which it is covered by the opponent. The capacity of a class to realize its objective interests, and so its class power, depends on the capacity, and so on the power, of its opponent."

To build a proletarian organization within the socio-political perspectives of the Bolsheviks it was essential for the working class to struggle against the influence of nationalism. Rather the very success of the 'Leninist party' depended on the merciless and irreconcilable struggle against the ideology of the bourgeoisie - nationalism. As Lenin repeatedly warned his comrades; "...all liberal-bourgeois nationalism sows the greatest corruption among the workers and does immense harm to the cause of freedom and the proletarian internationalism - these are the two irreconcilably hostile slogans...."<sup>4</sup> Consequently the duty of Marxists was to wage an "uncompromising struggle against contamination of the proletariat with bourgeois nationalism..."<sup>5</sup> for the basic truth was that "Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the 'most just', 'purest', most refined and civilised brand."<sup>6</sup>

The very emergence of the Bolsheviks and their strict maintenance as a working-class party was in the wake of a consistent struggle against bourgeois nationalism.

But in a country where nationalism is not a reactionary force, the working class is placed under an

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\* i.e. the party as the vanguard of the working class in its struggle for capturing state power to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

3 Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 20, p. 23. Critical remarks on the national question.

4 Ibid., p. 26.

5 Ibid., p. 27.

6 Ibid., p. 34.

objective necessity of using it in order to rally behind it other social classes. The alternative to this would be to fight nationalism and maintain 'ideological purity' at the cost of isolation.

Lenin already had a full-fledged conceptual framework in which he worked out the strategy and tactics of capturing power in a backward country like Russia as a part of the world revolution. An attempt to expound this view has been made in the ear for chapters. It has also been argued that Lenin conjunctually derived his Theses on the colonial question from the above conceptual framework.

With every turn of historical events however Lenin refused to remain imprisoned within this framework. He was capable of looking at new facts and experiences and contrasting them with already worked out conceptions in order to show their inadequacy to provide any guidance in a new conjuncture.

At the most crucial period of Russian history standing alone against the entire Bolshevik party which had been reared on his own past conceptions he wrote: "...It is essential to grasp the incontrovertible truth that a marxist must take cognizance of real life, of the true facts of reality, and not cling to a theory of yesterday, which, like all theories, at best only outlines the main and general, only comes near

to embracing life in all its complexity."<sup>7</sup>

The significance of Lenin's frequently emphasizing and, quoting: "Theory my friend is grey but green is the eternal tree of life,"<sup>8</sup> is to be understood in this sense - of theory being always an approximation of reality which strives to correspond as closely with that real movement which theory seeks to capture and guide.

This is what we consider Lenin's method of praxis. And this can be discerned as a running thread throughout Lenin's political career. In the scattered writings and remarks Lenin made in the post-revolutionary period can be seen precisely such an intellectual reconsidering of the new and real forces emerging in the world. These he contrasted with his already propounded conceptions and attempted to think afresh. One such attempt was on the subject of nationalism in the colonial and semi-colonial countries of the world.

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7 Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 21, p. 45. During the debate on the April theses, lashing out at the "orthodox Bolsheviks" who charged him with departing from his own theoretical conceptions he said: "the Bolsheviks slogans and ideas on the whole have been confirmed by history; but concretely things have worked out differently; they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected. To ignore or overlook this fact would mean taking after those "old Bolsheviks" who more than once already have played so regrettable a role in the history of our Party by reiterating formulas senselessly learned by rote instead of studying the specific features of the new and living reality." p. 44.

8 Ibid., p. 45.



Moreno B. Davis has pointed out how Lenin "while he usually counterposed 'bourgeois nationalism' and 'proletarian internationalism', (he) had shown by his cordial welcome of the nationalist movements in the colonial countries that he had room in his thinking for a third category: proletarian nationalism.... Lenin also remarked, very acutely, that nationalism might be capable of swinging the otherwise conservative peasantry into the track of progress and social revolution."<sup>9</sup>

Looking at the colonies from this fresh angle it seems that Lenin was beginning to wonder at the validity of the conception of a 'proletarian party' of the Bolshevik type where the subject countries were concerned. In some brief notes written during the Second Congress, Lenin reflected that it would be necessary to "adjust both Soviet institutions and the Communist Party (its membership, special tasks) to the level of the peasant countries."<sup>10</sup> Of course, the nature of these new parties and institutions "needs thinking about and seeking concrete answers."<sup>11</sup>

It has been our attempt to show that the Third International did not take up precisely this quest for concrete answers and thinking afresh. And this had a retrogressive

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9 H. B. Davis, Nationalism and Socialism, p. 208.

10 Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 42, p. 262. Remarks on the Report of Sultan-Isade concerning the Prospects of a Social Revolution in the East.

11 *Ibid.*

effect on any concretization of theory specific to the colonies. The International/Communist continued to be projected as the chief anti-Imperialist body by virtue of its objective of destroying world capitalism and making a world revolution. The Indian Communists who identified themselves totally with this anti-imperialist perspective because of the reality of their colonial situation failed to make a break between this empathy and the "theory" for colonial revolution which was enshrined by the Third International.

This break could only have occurred if they had extended their original assumptions or premises based on the actual given state and character of the Indian National movement, towards the evolution of a theory for the colonial revolution in India. Is nationalism the ideology of the bourgeoisie? Can there be a conception of proletarian nationalism without contradicting the Marxist conception of proletarian internationalism? Among others, these would be the questions posed and answered by the new theory. But such a development presupposed a break from the Leninist strict concept of a revolutionary Communist party; a break towards forming a party specifically suited to leading the national liberation movement to a higher stage in the context of a social revolution in India.

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