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# The Comintern and Indian Nationalism

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*'When the objective conditions for a deep political crisis have developed, the smallest conflicts, which, seemingly, are the least related to the actual seat of revolution, may have the most serious significance as a starting point .... The Proletarian Party is, before all, unconditionally bound to utilise all and every conflict, to unfold these conflicts, to widen their significance, to connect with them the agitation for the revolutionary slogans, to carry the knowledge of these conflicts to the wide masses, to rally them to an independent open action with their own demands ...'*

**LININ**

*'The first quality of a truly revolutionary party is the ability to face realities.'*

**TROTSKY**

*'In the event that the Indian bourgeoisie finds itself compelled to take even the tiniest step on the road of struggle against the arbitrary rule of Great Britain, the proletariat will naturally support such a step. But they will support it with their own methods: mass meetings, bold slogans, strikes, demonstrations and more decisive combat actions, depending on the relationship of forces and the circumstances. Precisely to do this must the proletariat have its hands free. Complete independence from the bourgeoisie is indispensable to the proletariat, above all in order to exert influence on the peasantry, the predominant mass of India's population.'*

**TROTSKY**

Lenin once remarked shortly before his death that the outbreak of socialist revolutions in Russia, China and India would settle the balance of class forces on a world scale. In the early decades of this century these nations comprised the bulk of humanity. In each of them there existed an enormous

mass of impoverished peasants, of which only a minor, if unequal, proportion found employment as a factory proletariat. In sharp contrast to the expansion of capitalism in Europe and the white colonies, in Asia, including 'semi-Asiatic' barbarous Russia, capitalism, when it did develop, merely superimposed itself on a primitive agrarian base.

But the three nations experienced this combined development through the refraction of quite different modes of imperialist domination. Whereas French and Belgian capital rapidly industrialised Russia, without, however, reconstituting the peasantry of the Black Earth region as a proletariat, China's semi-colonial domination left more room for the emergence of a national industrial bourgeoisie. In India capital exports were of no great significance in the industrial sector, which remained confined, before 1914, to cotton textiles in Bombay and jute textiles in Calcutta. Foreign capital flowed mostly into productive sectors with a low organic composition of capital, into non-productive sectors like trade, banking and insurance, and finally into the construction of infrastructure based on the export requirements of imperialism. On the other hand, in contrast to China, India was directly dominated by a colonial state. Any revolution which might develop thus had to face a more imposing, a better organised machinery of repression than anything the Chinese landowners' and capitalists had established.

It was in fact India's national peculiarity that these three nations her nascent working class faced the least favourable internal balance of forces. The rapid growth of this working class during the First World War and its aftermath was coterminous with an expansion of national capital; the complementary pole of its existence was a national bourgeoisie without any umbilical ties to foreign capital. Unlike the liberalism of the Russian bourgeoisie which, in Trotsky's description [1], was stillborn, that of the Indian bourgeoisie was strong enough to impose its hegemony over the whole nation. Whereas the Russian bourgeoisie had singularly failed to establish a stable coalition after

1. L. Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, cf. 1906 (translated A. Bostock, Allen Lane, 1972).

February, and the Chinese bourgeoisie could only establish its rule for some two decades and chiefly in the cities, the bourgeoisie of India not only won political independence but successfully prevented a proletarian or agrarian revolution in the process.

The dilemmas of the Comintern vis-à-vis the revolution in India sprang essentially from this difference, though at no stage in the 1920s did any of its rapporteurs or representatives concerned with India — M.N. Roy, G.K. Lohani, O. Kuusinen, R.P. Dutt, V. Chattopadhyaya — show the slightest awareness of this fact. Even before the rapid internal degeneration of the Comintern under the pressure of bureaucratic distortions within the Soviet Union, there was no attempt to grasp the essential national peculiarities of the Indian Revolution, to establish, for example, the decisive differences between China's semi-colonial domination and India's domination, for a longer historical period, by a colonial state. There was even less incentive for this sort of analysis once the Comintern began, with the Third Period, to impose a more or less uniform strategy on the countries of Europe, Asia and Latin America, regardless of their internal variations, the particular balance of forces prevailing within them, and so on.

But strategy, as Trotsky maintained, both in this period and subsequently, springs from national peculiarities. No historical sequence is ever an exact replica of the next.

In this article we shall attempt first to delineate the main features of the national conjuncture, shifting the focus progressively from this plane to that of the Comintern's understanding of the conjuncture and reactions to it. We are concerned mainly with the Twenties.

#### The Growth of National Capitalism in India

Before 1914 the cotton and jute industries dominated the industrial sector. During the war both industries experienced substantial expansion due to abnormally high rates of profit reflecting disruptions in the international economy — a sharp fall in the volume of raw jute exports and shifting terms of trade between raw jute and jute manufactures — and, secondly, a fall in the imports of cotton piecegoods. The expansion in textiles reached a peak in 1919-22, when the volume of investment rose from an annual Rs 395 crores\* to Rs 726 crores. It is significant, however, that in this period the level of investment in cotton textiles, produced mainly by national capitalists, grew in relation to the level of investment in jute textiles, where there was a greater involvement of British capital. As against a pre-war figure of 356, the total number of newly registered companies was 948 in 1919-20 and 1,039 in 1920-21. It is true that the boom coincided with, in fact attracted, sharp increases in the volume of capital imports, which reached Rs 55 crores in 1922, but there was simultaneously a shift in the relative proportions of national and British capital. 'The grip of European businessmen on the economy of India was loosened by the impact of the First World War', writes Bagchi. 'Many Indian concerns sprang up in engineering and other trades supplying the army and the navy... In other fields also, such as iron and steel, paper and cement, India began to supply more and more of her own requirements.' [2] By the Twenties new Indian industrial groups had begun to emerge.

The basic determinants of this early post-war expansion were not primarily the shifts in policy on the part of British imperialism, signified in the setting up of the Industrial Commission in 1916, or in the policy of differential protection advocated by the Fiscal Commission in 1922 (for instance, the raising of the import duty on cotton piecegoods). In fact, as Britain re-established her commercial grip during the boom and a new phase of 'relative stagnation' emerged [3], lasting from 1922 to the

Depression, the policy of imperialism again hardened. Protection was offered only piecemeal, and 'no general policy of industrialisation was ever adopted by the Government at this time' [4]. In short, while a shift in policy did play a certain role in encouraging industrial expansion, it was a secondary factor based on short term conjunctural requirements due to the war. The basic factors in the expansion of industry related to the growth of demand for certain products and the shift in India's commercial relations with the external world, in particular the phase of import-substitution which this permitted. It was a temporary modification in India's structural role in the world market which provided the real stimulant behind the first spurt of expansion. Already in 1921, in presenting his 'Theses to the Third World Congress of the Comintern', Trotsky had grasped this phenomenon: 'The transoceanic countries which export raw materials, including the purely colonial countries, have in their turn utilised the rupture of international ties for the development of their native industries.' [5]

After 1922 cotton, iron and steel entered a period of stagnation. 'Production continued to creep upward, though registering considerable excess capacity. Moreover, there was a severe fall in profits... The reinforcement of integration with world capitalism not only led to the loss of the momentum gained during the war but threatened to wipe out the war-time gains.' [6] During this period of 'waiting for the growth of Indian industrial capitalism' [7], imperialism reduced the export duty on leather and skins, defeated the proposal to reserve the coastal traffic of India for Indian shipping, fixed the exchange rate at 1s 6d as against the desired 1s 4d, and, between 1930-32, proceeded to adopt wholesale the policy of Imperial Preference. British capital imports shrank to an annual average of around £2 million in the middle Twenties. 1927 saw one of the lowest levels of new investment since the war. While the policy of differential protection did not affect the volume of investment substantially till the 1930s [8], the major consumer goods industries only came to enjoy tariff protection after 1929-30. It was not till the relative stability of the international economy was again jolted, this time more sharply, by the Depression that national capitalism entered a new period of expansion. The level of aggregate industrial investment in real terms showed a 'surprising' stability during these years. The advance made in this period was 'decisive' and 'irreversible', according to one writer. [9] 'The sugar, cement, matches and even steel industries were firmly established only during the 1930s.... These are the years when several major groups of modern Indian capitalists — the Birlas, Dalmia-Jains, Singhanias, Thapars — ventured into the industrial field.' [10] By the beginning of the 1940s the Indian industrial bourgeoisie had strengthened its economic base enormously — due to the protracted nature of the world crisis and the inter-entention of the Second World War.

The particular rhythm of expansion which Indian capitalism experienced was decisive in at least one respect: the reinforcement of Britain's stranglehold on the economy following the post-war boom, and the significant slowing

2. A.K. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India 1900-39* (Cambridge University Press, 1972).

3. Cf. Bipan Chandra, 'Colonialism and Modernisation', *Indian History Congress*, 28-30 December 1970, where the rhythm of industrialisation is linked to shifts in the international economy.

4. Bagchi, op. cit., p. 45.

5. L. Trotsky, *Theses of the Third World Congress on the International Situation and the Tasks of the Comintern*, adopted at the 16th session, July 1921, reprinted in *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (Pioneer Publishers, 1945).

6. Bipan Chandra, op. cit.

7. Bagchi, op. cit., p. 438.

8. Bagchi, op. cit., p. 80.

9. Bagchi, op. cit., pp. 438-9.

10. Chandra, op. cit.

down in the pace of industrialisation which this induced, gave the struggle for independence an unduly protracted character. Had the Indian capitalist class entered the Depression with the strength with which it left it, it could conceivably have achieved independence several years earlier.

#### The Rhythm of Working Class Consciousness

The early phase of industrial expansion unleashed by the First World War was accompanied, inevitably, by a growth in the size and organisation of the working class. The second factor was as important as the first, for no sooner was the Indian proletariat born than it had to struggle for survival. In 1919 the level of foodgrain prices was 93 per cent higher than its pre-war level, and that of home-made textiles 60 per cent higher. An official report [11] admitted that since the war the general level of real wages had fallen considerably. The movement of strikes closely mirrored the rhythm of inflation.

The strike wave reached its climax during the boom and thereafter declined continuously in the period of stagnation. When prices rose towards the end of 1921, there was a fresh outbreak of strikes after the previous climax of 1919/20. In the whole of that year over 6 lakhs\* of workers were involved in strikes, and some 6.9 million working days were lost. In early 1922, when prices fell, the proportion of unsuccessful strikes rose, and throughout that year the number of strikes and proportion of working days lost declined in relation to the previous year. Thereafter the decline was sharp and continuous, reaching a low ebb in 1926-27. In this period there was little increase in employment, and both the main sectors of textiles production experienced stagnation. In the coal mines employment shrank from 184,355 to 165,213. The struggles of this period were of a defensive character [12], launched to ward off wage cuts and fight retrenchment. Around 70 per cent of the strikes in this period were unsuccessful, this proportion reaching 82 per cent in 1926. The retreat reflected itself in the composition of the sessions of the All-India Trades Union Congress. The first session in Bombay in 1920, and especially the second at Jharia in 1922, had been marked by the presence of a large working class element. At the Lahore session in 1923 the middle class element was more prominent. 'This was more or less the case also at the next congress, Calcutta 1924, and at the next three congresses...' [13]

Official reports attempting to explain the sudden explosion of class conflicts in the factory focussed on the seminal role of the war. 'The war had done much to educate the Indian peasantry regarding conditions and methods in other countries', wrote one report. [14] 'Conditions particularly as regards working hours, which had formerly been accepted as inevitable, were no longer regarded as tolerable... The value of concerted action was rapidly realised.' A Memorandum of the Royal Commission on Labour similarly noted: 'The industrial worker has become more class conscious as a result of the economic and political influences which have come into play since the war...' [15] One index of this nascent class consciousness was the distinct tendency for localised disputes to spread rapidly to other sections of the industry, hence the large size of most of the important strikes, as shown in Table I:

Year	Strike	Numbers involved
1918	Bombay cotton textile workers	125,000
1919	Cawnpore woollen mills	17,000
1919/20	Jamalpur railway workers	16,000
1920	Calcutta jute workers	35,000
1920	Jamshedpur steel workers	32,000
1920	Sholapur textile workers	16,000
1920	Bombay textile workers	60,000
1920	Madras textile workers	17,000
1920	Ahmedabad textile workers	25,000

1923	Ahmedabad textile workers	46,000
1925	Bombay textile workers	145,000
1925	Northwestern Railway workers	22,000
1927	Kharagpur railway workers	15,000

The bitterness of some of these strikes is sufficiently indicated by the example of the strike of workers on the Northwestern Railways, which lasted three months and ended with the victimisation of several thousand workers; or of the Bombay mill strike of 1925, launched against a wage cut of 11½ per cent and lasting 2½ months; or of the strike of Ahmedabad textile workers, due to a 20 per cent wage cut and lasting 3 months.

The growth of the more elementary forms of proletarian class consciousness was thus simultaneous with, and in many instances even preceded, the birth of organised trade unionism, which from its modest beginnings in Madras in 1918 spread rapidly to embrace the Bombay and Calcutta proletariat by 1922, when there were some 113 unions. [16] In the period 1921-27 the Bombay cotton mills experienced a higher intensity of strikes than the jute mills of Bengal — both in terms of the number of disputes and the workers involved. While the latter were badly hit in 1922, when there were some 40 strikes involving a loss of over 1 million working days, the Bombay textile factories were badly hit in 1921, and again in 1923, 1924 and 1925. The following year the intensity of the strike wave fell sharply, coinciding with the low point of the recession. [17]

#### Shifts in the Political Conjuncture

The years following the First World War were crucial on another level too. It was in this period that the political character of Congress shifted from that of a small liberal-constitutional body to that of a movement with a 'mass' character rooted more firmly now in an active petty bourgeois cadre and capable of a sporadic mobilisation of sections of the peasantry. This shift was accompanied by another one, which would prove equally decisive in subsequent conjunctures — as Nehru wrote later in *Toward Freedom*: 'The Amritsar Congress 1919 was the first Gandhi Congress. The slogan Mahatma Gandhi ki jai began to dominate the Indian political horizon.' In another work he returned to this theme, dating the birth of the 'Gandhi era in Congress politics' to the special session of Congress at Calcutta in the autumn of 1920. 'A new class of delegate, chiefly drawn from the lower middle classes, became the type of Congressman... Now the peasants rolled in, and in its new garb Congress began to assume the look of a vast agrarian organisation.' [18] Thus the middle classes and peasantry made a more decisive entry into the political arena precisely as the leadership of Congress passed to Gandhi. To some extent the connection was a direct one. 'He (Gandhi) sent us to the villages...', wrote Nehru.

It was at the Calcutta Special Congress in 1920, that which inaugurated the 'Gandhi era in politics', that the organisation adopted the form of struggle characteristic of it in subsequent periods. 'Non-violent non-cooperation' for the first time provided a framework in terms of which the Congress leadership could mobilise its political base and simultaneously keep it firmly within its control. As such, it

11. *The Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour*, quoted in V.B. Karnik, *Strikes in India* (Bombay, 1967), p. 62.

12. Karnik, op. cit., pp. 128-32.

13. *Communist Challenge: Imperialism from the Dock. Meerut Conspiracy Case 1928-33* (Calcutta, 1967), p. 257.

14. Cf. Karnik, op. cit., p. 62.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

16. Cf. S.C. Jha, *The Indian Trade Union Movement* (Calcutta, 1970), pp. 104-7.

17. Cf. Bagchi, op. cit., pp. 142-3.

18. D. Norman, editor, *Nehru: The First Sixty Years*, volume one (London, 1965), pp. 59, 82, 84.

\* A lakh = 100,000

\* A crore = 10 million

was the form which best corresponded to the strategy of Congress [19], which Subhas Bose later described as the 'method of periodical compromise' [20]. The essence of this strategy consisted in the attempt to consolidate the political and economic position of the Indian bourgeoisie by forcing a series of concessions from the colonial state through the periodic mobilisation of mass pressure. These purely short-term concessions were not, however, the final object either of the Indian capitalist class or of the Congress leadership. Their final objective was a smashing of the entire framework of direct colonial domination which, in the consciousness of the rising bourgeoisie, specifically its older established professional strata from which the class derived both its organic as well as its traditional intelligentsia, acted as the chief constraint on the rapid capitalist development of the nation.

The left-democratic leaders of Congress, particularly Bose and Nehru, who combined in their persons the roles of organic and traditional intellectual, were quite conscious of this long-term contradiction between the interests of national-capitalist development and British imperialism. In a letter to *The Tribune* written in 1928, Nehru wrote of Britain and India, 'our economic interests conflict all along the line'. Bose was even more explicit: 'From the economic standpoint, India is to Britain a supplier of raw materials and a consumer of British manufactures. On the other hand, India aspires to be a manufacturing nation... The industrial progress of India is against Britain's economic interests.' [21] Thus the frequent short-term compromises effected between imperialism and sections of the Indian bourgeoisie were in no sense an 'abandonment' of the goal of 'independence'. They were in no sense a 'betrayal'. Rather, they were the means by which the Indian bourgeoisie gained in strength and confidence before reformulating its demands vis-à-vis imperialism. This, however, was a point which practically none of the major Comintern figures directly understood. It was precisely the point that to the bourgeoisie's relative economic autonomy there was no corresponding political autonomy that was missing in the debate at the Sixth Congress, as we shall see.

Of 1921 Nehru wrote: 'There was a strange mixture of nationalism and politics, and religion and mysticism and fanaticism. Behind all this was agrarian trouble and, in the big cities, a rising working class movement.' [22] These evolutions were largely separate, though they coincided in the empty space of time. There is little doubt that the most decisive intervention in this period was not that of the peasantry — the Moplah rebellion in Malabar, the Midnapore No-Tax campaign, or the experiment in Bardoli — but the massive wave of strikes in which some 600,000 workers were involved. It was this massive upsurge in working class militancy barely two years after the birth of trade unionism in India which had the greatest potential significance in terms of the anti-imperialist struggle. But Congress remained aloof, on the whole. To Bose and Nehru, despite the bourgeois radicalism of the first or the bourgeois republicanism of the second, the working class remained an external object, a sombre mass on their horizon, acting at a distance. Thus the social connections which were made in the first great upsurge of the post-war aftermath were not between 'the rising working class movement' and Congress, but between Congress and the peasantry. 'Our thinking became more and more conditioned to the peasantry', Nehru told a foreign observer, 'not so much to the industrial workers'. [23] Again, 'the advanced sections of labour fought shy of the National Congress. They misunderstood its leaders, and considered its ideology bourgeois-reactionary...' [24] Thus the strange atmosphere of 1921 which Nehru describes merely reflected the ideological amorphousness of the mass base which Congress acquired in that year. 'About our goal there was an entire absence of clear thinking.' [25]

For lack of the only social force capable of counterposing

to it its own scientific rationalism, the conservative semi-obscurantist, ethico-political pacifism which Gandhi so dramatically imposed on the mass movement with the Bardoli retreat of early 1922 was never seriously challenged as the dominant mass ideology of the national movement. The weak intellectual Fabianism of Nehru was never in any position to constitute the chief ideological link between the Congress leadership and its mass base. At best it provided the framework in terms of which the Indian bourgeoisie would attempt to work out its early Plans after the seizure of power. Gandhi was the linchpin of the national movement. Without Gandhi there was no ideological basis on which the Congress leadership, from Motilal Nehru to Subhas Bose, could appeal to and attract the vast backward peasant masses and the volatile urban middle class.

#### The Role of Gandhi

The strategy of Congress was a dual one. It had not only to mobilise its mass base to win concessions from imperialism. It had also to ensure that no 'transformation' occurred in this process, that the internal tendency of all national-revolutionary struggles to acquire a certain 'permanence', to rapidly outstrip the framework of bourgeois democracy, to shift the terrain radically from a purely national struggle to a social one — that this tendency, this inner logic would have no room to come into play. Thus the second limb of the Congress strategy was the blocking of the permanence of the national-revolutionary process, the task of ensuring that the movement was constantly deflected from its 'natural' elementary directions. Faced with the inner working out of this logic, the Chinese bourgeoisie in the same decade delegated to Chiang Kai-shek the task of brutally suppressing the Chinese working class. As the strike wave of 1925 began to affect not only the foreign-owned factories but the 'national' ones as well, a rapid shift occurred within the Kuomintang towards the right, leading in that year to the assassination of a prominent left-Kuomintang leader, and in the following year to Chiang's first coup. The Comintern, without in the least understanding this logic, of which Trotsky continually warned, continued to subordinate the Chinese Communists to Chiang. In India such a situation was never reached, except much later and in different circumstances. Here Gandhism provided the strategic and ideological framework in terms of which the various sections of the bourgeoisie could control the mass movement. The fact that this was possible for so long reflected not merely the greater internal cohesion of the Indian bourgeoisie, and not only the relative backwardness of the Indian Communists, but also the fact that the working class was never drawn directly into the political vortex. Its political strikes tended to be symbolic actions, hartals\* of short duration. The working class thus played a peripheral role in the national struggle, and its fierce combativity in the Twenties was a reflex of the economic recession rather than a symptom of growing politicisation.

Gandhism was in fact of decisive importance in this period, for in India ideology displaced force as the dominant

#### \* Walking off the job

19. On this question our ideas are taken from Bipan Chandra, 'The Indian capitalist class and imperialism before 1947', paper presented to the International Seminar on Imperialism, Independence and Social Transformation in the Contemporary World 24-29 March 1972, Delhi, and 'Elements of continuity and change in early nationalist activity', paper presented to the Indian History Congress, 27-29 December 1972.

20. E.C. Bose, *The Indian Struggle 1920-42* (Bombay, 1964), p. 306.

21. Cf. Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, volume three (Orient Longman, 1972), p. 22. The letter is dated 27/1/28. Bose, op. cit., p. 305.

22. From *Toward Freedom*, cf. Norman, op. cit., p. 75.

23. Norman, op. cit., p. 78, from an interview with Tibor Mende.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 178, from *Toward Freedom*.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 75. Cf. M.N. Roy, *Memoirs* (Allied Publishers, 1964), p. 542.

instance. In Nehru's words, 'non-violence was the moral equivalent of war and all violent struggle'. [26] Only non-violence could ensure that in a given conjuncture the mass movement, even if confined to symbolic actions of the peasantry and working class, would not surpass the limits of a bourgeois democratic struggle. Though there are many statements by Gandhi to show that this was how he understood the question, his obscurantist idealism obscured the fact. It was Nehru's self-conscious pragmatism which brought it out more clearly. Thus at the Lahore Congress in 1929 he would say, 'Violence too often brings reaction and demoralisation in its train, and in our country especially it may lead to disruption... The great majority of us, I take it, judge the issue not on moral but on practical grounds and if we reject the way of violence it is because it promises no substantial results.' [27] There were occasions when Gandhi was more explicit. Thus in 1922, in justifying the Bardoli retreat before Nehru, he wrote, 'I assure you that if the civil resistance movement had not been suspended we would have been leading not a non-violent struggle but essentially a violent struggle... the foetid smell of violence is still powerful, and it would be unwise to ignore or understate it.' [28] It is well known that the retreat was triggered off by the fact that at Chauri Chaura peasants had stormed and burned the local police station. Two years earlier he had referred, in similar circumstances, after the calling off of the *satyagraha*, to 'the recrudescence of violence on the part of those who might not have understood the doctrine of civil resistance....' [29]

At the Amritsar Congress, 'his' Congress, in Nehru's words, Gandhi was adamant that 'mob violence' in the Punjab and Gujarat should be formally condemned. The Subjects Committee had thrown out the resolution. Gandhi responded with a characteristic piece of blackmail. 'He firmly but politely and respectfully expressed his inability to attend the Congress, if the Congress could not see its way to accepting his viewpoint.' [30] When the resolution was successfully moved the next day, Gandhi remarked, 'There is no greater resolution before this Congress than this one...'. Two years later at the Ahmedabad Congress the ideology of Gandhism was stripped of its outer layers of mysticism: 'This Congress is further of the opinion that Civil Disobedience is the only civilised and effective substitute for an armed rebellion...' [31] It is in this light that Gandhi's apparently trivial interventions at subsequent Congresses on the question of violence assume a certain 'pragmatic' significance. Thus in 1929 the Congress passed a resolution condemning the bomb 'outrage' on the Viceroy's train, 'reiterating its conviction that such action... results in harm being done to the National Cause'. [32] Again, at the Karachi Congress in 1931, Gandhi's amendment dissociating Congress from Bhagat Singh's 'political violence' performed the same role of ideological reinforcement, though on this occasion the fight was a more difficult one. To large sections of the Indian masses Bhagat Singh had momentarily become more of a 'national hero' than Gandhi.

It would be wrong to understate the effects of what Roy, writing in *Imprecator* in 1923, called the 'deadening inactivity imposed by the authority of ethical dogmas' [33]. Nehru would describe these effects with a certain 'inside knowledge': 'fifteen years' stress on non-violence has changed the whole background in India', he wrote, 'and made the masses much more indifferent to, and even hostile to, the idea of terrorism as a method of political action. Even the classes from which the terrorists are usually drawn, the lower middle classes and intelligentsia; have been powerfully affected by the Congress propaganda against methods of violence.' [34] In the decade preceding its transformation into a 'mass' party, the decade in which Gandhi had returned to India, Congress had lived in the shadow of revolutionary violence. In the war years

dacoities\* and assassinations had increased sharply; dozens of terrorists had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment or hanged. There had been the Nasik Conspiracy Case, the Gwalior Conspiracy Case, Howrah Conspiracy Case, Dacca Conspiracy Case, Barisal Conspiracy Case, Lahore Conspiracy Case. Copies of *Jahan-i-Islam* which advocated the extermination of Englishmen were freely circulated in Lahore and Calcutta [35]. In this situation an early independent development of the working class movement on a political basis would undoubtedly have drawn such currents into itself. As it was, there was no working class party till the middle Thirties, and by that stage Gandhi had effectively neutralised some of these currents. Bose wrote later that there had been a possibility in the early stages, at the time of the first Civil Disobedience campaign, that the ex-revolutionaries 'as a class would go against the Congress owing to ideological differences', but that in 1921 they had been won over by Gandhi [36] under the illusion that 'swaraj'\* would come within a year.

The disintegration of the petty bourgeois terrorist current was, however, only one of Gandhi's early tactical victories. The other was the neutralisation of the 'left' current within Congress, specifically Nehru, which, after the death of Tilak and later Das, remained the only potential source of opposition to his leadership. Nehru's deliberate promotion by Gandhi to the presidency of the Lahore Congress in 1929 had the function of reinforcing an already strong emotional bond between the two men. 'No-one has moved me and inspired me more than you', Nehru had written to Gandhi the previous year. [37] 'Am I not your child in politics?' Gandhi saw the manoeuvre in more rational terms: 'He is undoubtedly an extremist, but he is humble enough and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point' [38]. To those who disputed the choice of Nehru, Gandhi gave the assurance that it would be like having himself in the chair. [39] 'The Lahore Congress was a great victory for the Mahatma', Bose wrote some years later, 'not without some bitterness.' [40] The Working Committee elected in January 1930, with Nehru's assistance, was dominated by a solid pro-Gandhi bloc. 'With a subservient cabinet, it was possible for him to conclude the pact with Irwin in March 1931, to have himself appointed as the sole representative to the Round Table Conference, to conclude the Poona Agreement in September 1932...' [41] Nehru's neutralisation had a certain relative effectivity. Though his initial reaction to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had been one of dismay, he finally came round to accepting it. Helplessly he wrote in *Toward Freedom*, 'even if we disagreed with him, what could we do? Throw him over? Break from him? Announce our disagreement?' [42]

But Gandhi's role was not confined to paralysing the energies of the masses with an ideology of pacifism or to

#### \* Robberies motivated socially and/or politically

#### \* Freedom

26. Norman, op. cit., p. 76.

27. Reported in B. Pattabhi Sitaramaya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, volume one, 1885-1925 (New Delhi, 1969) p. 305.

28. Norman, op. cit., p. 85, letter dated 19/2/22.

29. Reported Sitaramaya, op. cit., p. 173.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

33. *International Press Correspondence* (hereafter *Imprecator*), 26/4/23.

34. Norman, op. cit., pp. 146-9, from *Toward Freedom*.

35. Cf. R. Gopal, *How India Struggled for Freedom* (Bombay, 1967), pp. 219ff.

36. Bose, op. cit., pp. 60, 66.

37. Selected Works, p. 19, letter dated 23/1/28.

38. Norman, op. cit., p. 191.

39. Cf. Edwardes, *Nehru* (Allen Lane, 1971), p. 76.

40. Bose, op. cit., p. 174.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

42. Norman, op. cit., p. 241.

#### \* Passive resistance

disintegrating the two 'left' currents within the nationalist struggle. His sudden and apparent shifts to the left, such as the resumption of Civil Disobedience at the Lahore Congress, signified an attempt to move with the broader shifts in the mass movement, to co-opt and radically block the logic of a permanent transition from the terrain of bourgeois democracy and anti-imperialism to social revolution. In defending the resumption of Civil Disobedience he stated, 'Civil Disobedience alone can save the country from impending lawlessness and secret crime, since there is a party of violence in the country which will not listen to speeches and resolutions... but believes only in direct action'. [43] Just as Stalin did more to disintegrate the morale of the Left Opposition by his manoeuvre of an apparent wholesale adoption of their policies than by outright coercion, Gandhi in 1929, in that same decisive year, 'took the wind out of the sails of the Extremists by himself advocating independence at the (Lahore) Congress and divided the ranks of the opposition by winning over some of the left wing leaders' (Bose). [44] In a penetrating analysis Bose refers to Gandhi's 'capacity to assimilate other ideas and policies. But for the latter factor, Gandhism would have ceased to dominate the Congress long ago' [45].

Gandhi, then, was the guiding personality in the national movement in these years. Without an analysis of his role, it is impossible to grasp concretely how it was possible for the Congress leadership not only to bring pressure to bear on the colonial state through sporadic mass mobilisations, but also to thwart the independent development of a mass peasant struggle or workers' revolt within the framework of these mobilisations.

#### Symptoms of Renewed Radicalisation 1928-30

This role of unleashing a mass movement and simultaneously restraining it assumed the greatest importance towards the close of the decade, with a renewed upsurge in mass consciousness. The five years from 1922 to 1927 saw a retreat on almost all fronts. Industry entered a period of stagnation and even crisis, strikes became purely defensive, the proportion of unsuccessful strikes increased sharply, the level of unemployment rose, while politically the national movement fell to a low ebb. Gandhi retired from politics, and the leadership of Congress passed to the Swarajists under Das. The tactic of mass mobilisation was replaced by the tactic of contesting elections and fighting from within the legislatures. The arena and character of the struggle shifted to a more constitutional plane. Simultaneously, and starting as early as 1923, there was a progressive deterioration in Hindu-Muslim relations, and in 1924 Allahabad saw serious communal rioting.

The first signs of a renewal of radicalisation after this slump came with the sharp upswing in the curve of industrial strikes beginning in 1928 or late 1927. In the course of that year the strike wave reached a new intensity, with more workers involved in strikes than at any time since 1921, and with a total loss of working days far exceeding anything previously witnessed — 31 million as against an earlier peak, in 1925, of 13 million. An official report stated of the strikes in 1928, 'a significant feature of the disputes during that year was the growth of picketing and intimidation which in some cases resulted in violence and bloodshed. In the general strikes in the Bombay textile mills and also in the strike on the East India Railways, the South Indian Railway and in the Fort Gloster jute mills, Bengal, the police were compelled to resort to firing.' [46] Again the size of many of the strikes was significant, as is shown in Table II.

Year	Strike	Numbers involved
1928	East India Railways	16,315
1929	Calcutta jute mills	200,000
1929	Bombay textile mills	140,000
1930	GIP Railway strike	22,608

The East India Railway strike was triggered off by dismissals and retrenchment, the Calcutta jute strike by the employers' attempt to increase the working week and introduce a single shift system, the Bombay textile strike by victimisations in the Wadia group of mills. One writer says of the strikes in this period that 'they were more bitter (than earlier ones) and fought with a determination and vigour which were not so much in evidence during the earlier periods' [47].

But the process was not merely one of radicalisation. It is true that the circulation of political ideas was much wider in this period than in the earlier one, that many workers were becoming acquainted with the ideas of class struggle, that the split in the trade union movement between a reformist and revolutionary wing was bound to affect the consciousness of the more advanced layers. But this was also a period of a loss of bargaining power on the part of the working class, wage cuts being enforced in practically all the major centres. 'Given the excess supply of labour, concerted action by trade unions was very difficult. Further, the Trades Dispute Act of 1929 made it a punishable offence to strike without sufficient reason.' [48] Already by October 1928, in a letter to Chattopadhyaya in Berlin, Nehru was writing, 'labour after a succession of struggles is exhausted....' [49] 'In Bombay the strike of 1928 was followed by a long period of dwindling trade union membership and generally ineffective union resistance to wage cuts in the face of a dwindling volume of employment....' [50] The following year in Bengal some 130,000 jute workers were thrown out of work. It is interesting that the Communists on trial in the Meerut Conspiracy Case themselves pointed out that 'at the end of 1929 a certain exhaustion became apparent' [51].

A second early symptom of radicalisation was the victory of the 'left' current at the national Congress held in Madras in late 1927, where the independence resolution was put and carried under Nehru's influence. Bose saw this victory as 'standing for a definite orientation towards the left', though that was not the analysis given in the pages of the Comintern weekly, as we shall see. [52] When, in May 1928, Bose went to preside over the Maharashtra Provincial Conference at Poona, the 'enthusiasm' he met there was 'striking'. 'I urged that the Congress should directly take up the task of organising labour....' [53] That a new mood of militancy pervaded sections of the Congress rank and file even before the year had begun is brought out by Luhan's report in an issue of *Imprecoer* in July 1927, in which it was stated, 'since the beginning of this year the Nagpur Committee of the Indian National Congress has been showing great disaffection with the official leadership. On 25 April this year this Committee adopted a resolution censuring the Congress leaders for their recent policy of co-operation with the British Government in the legislative assembly....' The president of the Committee is reported to have started a small movement called the Nagpur Republicans, which began to develop 'as a rallying point for all the left elements within and without Congress'. [54] Finally, towards the end of 1928, at the national Congress, 'though the left wing leaders were inclined to avoid an open split, the rank and file

43. R.C. Majumdar and A.K. Majumdar, *Struggle for Freedom* (Bombay, 1969) p.465.

44. Bose, op. cit., p.159.

45. *Ibid.*, p.396.

46. *Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour*, cited in Kamik, op. cit., p.170.

47. Kamik, op. cit., p.164. He attributes this to 'the entry of the Communists', but this is doubtful.

48. Bagchi, op. cit., p.142.

49. *Selected Works*, p.297, letter dated 23/1/29.

50. Bagchi, op. cit., p.144.

51. *Meerut Conspiracy Case*, p.258.

52. Bose, op. cit., pp.145-6.

53. *Ibid.*, p.152. Bose repeated this sentiment at the Lahore Congress the next year.

54. G.K. Luhan, *Imprecoer*, 14/7/27.

of the left wing would not think of a compromise' [55]. Gandhi's attempt to defeat the independence resolution at this Congress was only narrowly successful, with some 973 delegates voting against. 'The voting showed that the left wing was strong and influential', writes Bose. [56]

Bose, however, notes that the Congress leadership made no efforts to intervene in the working class struggles which erupted in 1928, and that by 1930, when the Civil Disobedience movement was launched, this current of struggle had subsided. [57] Outside Congress there were other more distant signs of a shift to the left. Thus in January 1929 the Workers' and Peasants' Party (WPP) contested the municipal elections in Bombay, winning some 12,453 votes. Roy wrote in *Imprecoer*, 'the election result indicates the general radicalisation of the entire political situation' [58]. The following year saw the resurgence in Bengal of the sporadic individual terrorism of the petty bourgeoisie, signified most conspicuously by the Chittagong Armoury Raid. But at that stage the Civil Disobedience movement was in full swing. Corresponding to the shift to the left in the entire political situation of the country, imperialism intensified its repression. By June the Congress had been declared illegal, and some 50,000 men, women and children jailed. Towards the close of the year the United Provinces were on the brink of agrarian revolution, though it was only several years later that the peasant movement acquired any organisational shape.

The impression conveyed by these years is of a series of disconnected upheavals, of a massive current of radicalisation, but without any internal order or coherence; of an upsurge in mass consciousness fragmented by its own uneven rhythm and dispersed by the discontinuities of space. Congress was in no position, in fact, to lead this struggle forward along revolutionary lines, to utilise and develop its inherent potential, for its own framework of thought did not include the organisation of either the peasantry or the working class on an independent class basis. But witnessing this upheaval from afar, a series of Comintern writers vigorously denounced Congress for failing precisely to carry the struggle forward in a revolutionary direction, as if its leadership had ever proclaimed this as one of its objectives. But the illusion was not entirely without some basis in reality, for Congress was a series of paradoxes, a fusion of apparently contradictory elements. In its leadership it included such conspicuously left elements as Nehru and Bose, both of whom understood that even within the womb of colonised India a society had grown up divided into classes; that in India, as in advanced Europe, there were capitalists and workers. Yet these petty bourgeois radicals led an organisation which articulated the class interests of the Indian bourgeoisie, even when their sympathies lay with the working class. The leadership of Congress, a party of bourgeois democracy, lay with elements drawn from a social stratum with no immediate connections with business or the ownership of the land, and even critical of capitalists and landowners. Congress more than any other organisation at that period symbolised the 'organic' function which Gramsci attributed to intellectuals in the subordinate tasks of 'social hegemony and political government'.

But a second peculiarity sprang from the fact that Congress combined the characteristics of a class-party with those of a mass movement. In its periods of intensified activity, as in 1921 or 1930, it gave the appearance of an unorganised spontaneous force, the mere skeletal framework of the most disparate currents of opposition to British rule. One Comintern writer remarked, with obvious despair, 'the masses do not yet believe in the treachery of the Congress because they think that they are the Congress....' [59] In 1920 Gandhi had referred to Congress as a 'national organisation providing a platform for all parties to appeal to the Nation' [60], and later Nehru would reiterate a similar conception when he wrote: 'The Congress was a party in some ways; it

has also been a joint platform for several parties.' [61] This complex ambiguous character, directly reflecting the fact that in India alone of the major colonial countries an indigenous bourgeoisie was successful in leading a mass movement against imperialism, was a source of considerable intellectual confusion in the Comintern, in which two contradictory conceptions of Congress co-existed: on the one hand, of Congress as a narrow class party of Indian capitalism and semi-feudal interests, analogous to the Kuomintang in China or the Tory Party in Britain; and on the other, of Congress as an implicitly or potentially revolutionary movement restrained from developing according to its internal logic by an accidental play of forces — for example, the illusions of the petty bourgeois elements in its leadership, or the charismatic fascination of Gandhi. The Comintern's failure to understand that the peculiarity of Congress was precisely that it combined both these moments was, however, only complementary to its failure to grasp the strategy of bourgeois nationalism in India.

#### Slow Formation of the CPI

Crucial to the ability of the bourgeoisie, including its professional-intellectual strata, to impose its hegemony on the national movement, and guide it according to its own strategy of periodic compromise, was the exceptional backwardness of the Indian Communist Party in its early phases of attempted formation. Due to this backward development the working class was left politically leaderless in a period (1919-30) when it was time and again forced into the sharpest conflicts with British and Indian capitalists and when it demonstrated its own capacity for political interventions, as when it demonstrated against the Simon Commission, or when it interrupted the Calcutta Congress late in 1928 with a symbolic occupation of the platform for some two hours [62]. For while it lacked the leadership of a firm Communist Party, the working class had not been integrated, either ideologically or organisationally, into the framework of Congress.

The CPI in fact did not begin to grow till 1934, by which stage a shift to the Popular Front was already visible. In that year the size of the party increased from 20 members to 150. [63] In the previous six years the Comintern had voiced frequent complaints about the practical insignificance of a Communist Party in India. Most of these complaints began to be made in 1928, when the phase of political recession abruptly ended with the announcement of the Simon Commission. At the Sixth Comintern Congress in the middle of 1928, one of the delegates stated that no definite steps had been taken 'during the last nine years to bring about the formation of a CP in India.' [64] At the same Congress, in presenting his 'Theses on the Revolutionary Movement...', Kuusinen had described the 'union of all Communist groups and individual Communists scattered throughout the country into a single, illegal, independent and centralised party' as the 'first task of Indian

55. Bose, op. cit., p.157.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, p.148.

58. Roy, *Imprecoer*, 1/3/29.

59. G.S., *Imprecoer*, 26/2/31. This writer goes on to say: 'In reality the Congress is a collection of rich lawyers, patriotic usurers, merchants selling goods to English firms, manufacturers and their underlings, who hide behind "revolutionary" phrases to deceive the masses....'

60. Sitaramaya, op. cit., p.193.

61. Norman, op. cit., p.67.

62. Reported in Sitaramaya, op. cit., p.332, where the number of these workers is given as 50,000. Other estimates are: 10,000 (Bose, op. cit., p.158); 20,000 (S. Chandrasekhar, cited Roy, *Imprecoer*, 22/2/29); 25,000 (Roy, *Imprecoer*, 15/2/29).

63. G.D. Overstreet and M. Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Bombay, 1960), p.155.

64. S. Sur, reported *Imprecoer*, 3/8/28.

Communists' [65] Later in 1928 an ECCI document stated that as the existing Communist Party of India showed no signs of revolutionary life, it had 'no grounds to consider and even call itself Communist'. [66]

It is true that at this time, December 1928, after the conference of the Workers' and Peasants' Party held in Calcutta, the WPP leadership constituted itself as the CPI, elected a Central Committee and applied for admission to the Comintern. But this attempt proved as futile apparently as the others had been, for shortly before the July Plenum of the ECCI the following year Manuisky wrote that there was still no independent Communist Party in India. [67] The same was said by R.P. Dutt as late as the end of the next year, 1930. [68] The situation within the CP in that year is revealed by the following interesting comment of one of its early members, 'chaos and disorganisation in the Party all over the country appeared in an acute form. Comrades in Calcutta had been carrying on the work of the Party under the name "The Calcutta Committee of the CPI". In spite of repeated requests from the Calcutta Committee to give an all-India shape to the CP, there was no response from the Party leaders in Bombay.' [69] In fact, in an article which appeared in a German magazine in February 1931, Roy dismissed the CPI 'as of little consequence and hardly existing outside of Bombay and Calcutta. He reported that the Party consisted largely of students and functioned more as a student group than anything else.' [70] It is perhaps not surprising then that in the same month *Impreor* carried an article by the All-India Anti-Imperialist League which called for the establishment of this body in India on the grounds that 'it is only through this organ... that the tasks of the national revolution can be carried through'. The programme it advocated included the establishment of a Workers' and Peasants' Republic. [71] In June 1932 *Impreor* published an 'Open Letter' from the Communist Parties of China, Britain and Germany appealing to the Indian Communists to 'undertake the formation of the Communist Party'. [72] The CPC reiterated this appeal the following year in July. [73] After this, and following the release of some of the Meerut prisoners, a secret conference of the Party was held in Calcutta in December 1933 at which a new political resolution and party constitution were adopted. [74]

There is ample evidence, then, for the fact that in this crucial period of mass struggles from 1928 to 1932 there was no centralised, effective, functioning Communist Party in India. Trotsky had described similar situations in Europe as 'a crisis of leadership'. In India, however, this 'crisis' did not assume the same staggering proportions as for example it had in Italy in 1920, or would do in France during the Popular Front. It was nevertheless a real, if invisible, factor in the situation of that period, and one which contrasted sharply with the development of the Chinese Communist Party, which already by July 1926 had a membership of 30,000 and by the spring of 1927 a membership of 58,000; or with that of the Indonesian Communist Party, which in 1926 claimed 3,000 members, controlled several trade unions, and had successfully infiltrated leadership positions in Sarekat Islam. In fact, as early as 1923 one estimate put the membership of the Perserikat Komunis di Indonesia at 13,000. [75] In that year in India there were probably not more than 50 Communists, let alone an organised Communist Party.

An official Government circular from Whitehall provides some information on the strength of the Indian Communists in 1922 [76]. According to its report there were small communist and semi-communist groups in Bombay, Madras, Lahore, Bengal and the United Provinces. Late in 1922 Roy had instructed the Bombay, Madras and Lahore groups to contact each other, which indicates that they were working in isolation. The organisation of the Bengal group was described as 'rudimentary', although they were said to produce a considerable amount of propaganda. Finally, it is

clear from the circular that all these groups, with the possible exception of the Madras one under S. Chettiar, were mainly propagandist. That is, they had not made the transition to agitation.

A few years later, in December 1925, Muzaffar Ahmad and some others had formally constituted an all-India Communist Party, but this attempt proved abortive, for when in March 1927 the EC of the CPI met to discuss Roy's request that the party be disbanded and replaced by an All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party, the committee members decided that in view of the party's inactivity no formal dissolution was required. [77] Nevertheless, some sort of Central Committee apparently continued to meet, 'in some years .... even four times' [78].

#### The Workers' and Peasants' Party

The reason for this apparently odd state of affairs was that although no centralised Communist Party was founded in this period, by the end of 1928 an All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party had successfully been established. The first provincial WPP was established in Bengal early in 1926, following a peasant conference at Krishnanagar in Nadia. A year later a WPP was established in Bombay and another one in Punjab. Finally in 1928 a fourth one was founded in the United Provinces. It is clear that the intervention which the Communists made in some of the strikes of 1928 was through the medium of these organisations, and not formally as members of a Communist Party. Ahmad states, 'although the CPI was not illegal, it was difficult to work under its name openly. What we used to decide in the CP was actually put into practice from the platform of the WPP. The manifestos of this party were all drafted by the CC of the CP.' [79] Hence, presumably, the need to maintain a Communist Central Committee even when there was no Communist Party as such.

There is sufficient evidence to indicate that the various Workers' and Peasants' Parties were in fact quite active in the massive upheaval of 1928. In May that year Luhan wrote in *Impreor* that the WPP had taken a 'prominent part' in organising strike action, in forming strike committees and carrying on 'incessant propaganda by daily strike meetings' [80]. Ahmad states that members of the WPP 'wholeheartedly participated' in the struggles of 1928. It is equally clear, however, that the social composition of the various provincial organisations differed quite significantly, particularly as between the Bombay and Bengal sections. Thus, while in the course of 1928 the Bombay WPP was said to dominate the 'Congress organisation in Bombay', to have organised the demonstrations of workers

against the Simon Commission [81] and to have been involved in several strikes, in Bengal, according to one report at the Sixth Comintern Congress, the WPP was said to be 'falling into the hands of philanthropic petty bourgeoisie' [82]. Ahmad also implies this with his remark that 'in Bengal, non-Communists were more numerous in the WPP' [83]. Finally, Bose noted and tried to explain the difference with the theory that 'class differentiation' was more 'acute' in Bombay than in Bengal, and that consequently the petty bourgeois element was not so strong or influential there as in Bengal. [84]

At any rate, it is clear that insofar as Communists were engaged in mass struggle in this period this was primarily through the Workers' and Peasants' Party, which, if we accept the reliability of one Comintern reporter [85], could even attract 'thousands of poor peasants' to its provincial conferences in early 1929. As we shall see, this greater 'mass' character of the WPP was an important factor to Communists working in India, although the Comintern, from a distance, had informally abolished it in the middle of 1928.

#### The Decolonisation Debate 1928

At no time did the Comintern discuss the question of India in greater detail than at the Sixth Comintern Congress from July to September 1928. By that stage Chiang's two coups and the disastrous adventure of the Canton Commune had left the Stalin-Bukharin line advocating alliance with the Kuomintang in shambles. But even six months after Stalin had shed the precious blood of the Canton workers with the pincer he organised to coincide with the RCP Congress in December 1927, there was a profound silence on the subject. The episode was referred to as a 'rear-guard action' which had nevertheless been 'correct'. The question of China, though of prime importance after the defeats of 1927, was nonetheless conveniently pushed into the background at the Sixth Congress by an apparently (and in many ways in fact) quite academic question, the 'decolonisation debate'. According to Roy, it was S. Tagore who, in the course of 1927, first emphasised the rapid development of industry in India and triggered off the discussion. To most of the participants, however, the word 'decolonisation' was associated with Roy himself, and it is true that as early as 1921 Roy was promulgating the theory that with the First World War the policy of imperialism had changed radically on the question of India's industrialisation. At this time Roy argued, curiously, that if after the war the Government had resumed its old policy of checking the country's development, this would have compelled the bourgeoisie to take its stand at the head of the national movement. To Roy the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms had forestalled this possibility. Of course, in the seven or eight years following the appearance of Roy's article and book *India in Transition*, imperialism hardened its policy considerably despite the partial concessions it made on the tariff question, thus precisely forcing the bourgeoisie to renew the struggle for further concessions and more concrete prospects of accommodation.

At the Congress it was Kuusinen who proposed the 'traditional' view. The early concessions granted by imperialism had been due to 'fear of the revolutionary movement during the war'. Once this movement was 'betrayed' by the Indian bourgeoisie in 1922, imperialism 'once more reverted to its policy of hindering India's industrial development'. Kuusinen argued, correctly, that 'the specific colonial forms of capitalist exploitation ... in the final analysis hinder the development of the productive forces of the colonies .... Since, however, colonial exploitation presupposes some encouragement of colonial production, this is directed on such lines and promoted only in such a degree as correspond to the interests of the metropolis .... Part of the peasantry, for example, may be encouraged to turn from grain cultivation to the production of cotton,

sugar or rubber (Sudan, Cuba, Java, Egypt) .... Real industrialisation of the colonial country, in particular the building up of a flourishing engineering industry which would promote the independent development of its productive forces, is not encouraged but, on the contrary, is hindered by the metropolis.' [86] At an early session of the Congress, Bukharin had endorsed this view. Kuusinen came back to the question much later, at the Twenty-Ninth Session: 'Industrialisation means the transformation of an agrarian into an industrial country, it means a general thorough industrial development, above all development of the production of the means of production .... This is not a question of whether any industrial development has taken place in India — this has certainly been the case — it is rather a question of whether it is the policy of British imperialism to industrialise India.' [87] According to Kuusinen, at most 10 per cent of British capital exports to India at the height of the boom went into manufacturing; most of the investment in that period was non-productive. Some sessions later the counter-attack began, based sometimes on quite astonishingly abstract arguments. Thus Cox, who described the 'transformation of the colonies into spheres for industrialisation on the part of the imperialist bourgeoisie' as a 'fundamental law of imperialism' [88]. At the next session S. Tagore took the Industrial Commission of 1916 as signalling a 'turn in the policy of British imperialism in India'. The framework of the argument was provided by the model of a 'fully developed neo-colonial relationship': 'The sole purpose of the Taxation Commission was to adjust the burden of taxation in order to expand the internal market. The scheme for modernisation of agriculture was formulated for the purpose of raising the purchasing power of the peasantry.' [89] Annot thought it was sufficient to refer to Lenin on the export of capital to make the point that Britain was now industrialising India. [90] Bennett went even further in a mechanical understanding of the question: he referred to the 'law' which Marx had postulated according to which railways in India would usher in an epoch of rapid industrialisation. [91] Rothstein, another member of the same delegation, had apparently gone to the extent of saying that due to imperialism the colonies would be transformed into 'serious competitors' of the metropolis. Replying to these interventions, Kuusinen made the obvious point that it was too simple to identify capital exports with industrialisation: 'Loan capital is being exported by England to Australia or Canada, or by America to Germany. This can promote industrialisation and in fact does .... (In India) as is clearly to be seen from the statistical material, British export capital serves for the greater part unproductive purposes ....' [92].

Underlying this apparently academic problem was a political one, the problem of the alignment of social forces in terms of which the national movement would develop. But the politics deduced from the orthodox position in Kuusinen's 'Theses' were not those which corresponded to it logically. No sharp political differentiation divided the delegates who argued for and against the notion of a British NEP. For while the British delegation and Tagore argued, quite logically, that the Indian bourgeoisie had now to be regarded as a counter-revolutionary force, 'in the same camp' as imperialism politically because their short and perhaps even long term economic interests converged around the goal of industrialising India, neither Kuusinen nor any of

65. Reported in J. Degras, *The Communist International 1919-43: Documents, Volume Two, 1923-28* (Oxford University Press, 1960) p.544.  
66. *Ibid.*, pp.558-9. Dated December 1928.  
67. Degras, *The CI 1919-43: Documents, Volume Three, 1929-43* (OUP, 1965), p.22.  
68. Degras, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp.558-9.  
69. M. Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India. Years of Formation 1921-33* (Calcutta, 1959), p.37.  
70. Cited by J.P. Halthcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India. M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy 1920-39* (Princeton University Press, 1971), p.179.  
71. *Impreor*, 5/2/31.  
72. Degras, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p.220.  
73. Mentioned by Ahmad, *op. cit.*  
74. *Ibid.*  
75. For the PKI, cf. Degras, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p.311; *Impreor*, 16/8/23, reports by Bergama and Tan Malaka; *Impreor*, 27/9/23, further report by Bergama.  
76. Home Political Files, 103/IV/1923, 'Summary of information regarding Indian Communists' (Indian National Archives, N. Delhi).  
77. Halthcox, *op. cit.*, p.56.  
78. Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p.21.  
79. *Ibid.*, pp.23-4.  
80. Luhan, *Impreor*, 31/5/28.

81. Cf. C. Dutt, *Labour Monthly*, March 1928.  
82. S. Sur, *Impreor*, 8/10/28.  
83. Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p.23.  
84. Bose, *op. cit.*, p.89.  
85. P. Sch, *Impreor*, 29/3/29.  
86. Kuusinen, cited Degras, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp.534ff.  
87. Kuusinen, *Impreor*, 4/10/28.  
88. Cox, *Impreor*, 25/10/28.  
89. Tagore, *Impreor*, 30/10/28.  
90. Annot, *Impreor*, 30/10/28.  
91. Bennett, *Impreor*, 30/10/28.  
92. Kuusinen, *Impreor*, 21/11/28.

his supporters in the debate ever argued that the sharpening of the contradiction between imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie implied in imperialism's reversion to the old anti-industrial policy would produce necessary political effects in driving the bourgeoisie to the left, even if periodically and with vacillations. The furthest they went was to argue, as Kuusinen did, that the bourgeoisie was a national-reformist force, in other words 'vacillating and inclined to compromise' [93].

But even this position was not argued in terms of a characterisation of the strategy of bourgeois nationalism. The apparently 'ambiguous' role of the colonial bourgeoisie in the national movement was not explained from the standpoint of the specific forms of struggle corresponding to the interests of that bourgeoisie as an independent class, but in terms of economic divisions within the bourgeoisie. 'The national bourgeoisie in these colonial countries do not adopt a uniform attitude to imperialism', Kuusinen argued. 'One part, more especially the commercial bourgeoisie, directly serves the interests of imperialist capital .... The other part .... especially those representing the interests of native industry, support the national movement; this tendency, vacillating and inclined to compromise, may be called national-reformism.' [94] 'National-reformism' was thus the political reflection of an economic incoherence within the bourgeoisie. The 'vacillations' of the colonial bourgeoisie sprang not from the immanent logic of its strategy but from internal contradictions due to relatively distinct economic interests. But if this had in fact been the case in India, a quite different process would have occurred. The bourgeoisie would have split organisationally into its comprador and national sections.

The position was a confused one, to say the least. Murphy, the only British delegate to support Kuusinen, argued correctly against a crude lumping together of imperialism and the national bourgeoisie, but argued simultaneously that there was no hope of the latter carrying through a policy of industrialisation in the colony. [95] Kuusinen was more helplessly confused on the important political questions: 'The national bourgeoisie are not significant as a force in the struggle against imperialism. Nevertheless this bourgeois-reformist opposition has a real and specific significance for the development of the revolutionary movement .... insofar as it has any mass influence at all.' [96] The same inconsistencies were apparent in the statements of the Indian Communists on trial in the Meerut Case: 'The conclusion which follows from these facts is that British imperialist policy is generally directed towards the restriction of Indian industrial development .... The reactionary policy of imperialism in relation to industry .... all go to determine that the policy of the bourgeois class must be one of hostility to imperialism .... Nevertheless, we consider that the Indian bourgeoisie is not objectively capable of pursuing a revolutionary policy .... It is too weak and its interests are bound up too closely with both British imperialism [emphasis mine - JB] and Indian feudalism.' [97] They went on to argue that the Indian bourgeoisie was not 'serious' about independence, and cited as evidence the fact that neither the Non-Cooperation Movement (1919-23) nor the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1) had demanded complete independence. As for Nehru's Independence for India League, 'the formation of this organisation was simply a demagogic device, having no serious purpose to secure independence behind it'. [98] 'Independence for the Congress leaders is a "phrase".'

The position of Tagore and the British delegates was internally consistent, though wrong. The logic of decolonisation was expressed in the sharpest terms by Tagore when he said at the Congress, 'to the same degree as the hindrance in the way of the capitalist development of India has been removed by British imperialism, the bourgeoisie is sliding more and more towards cooperation and one group after the other is capitulating to imperialism' [99]. This one-sided understanding of the dialectics of the national movement

was nonetheless consistent with the assumption that in its new policy British imperialism sought only to further the capitalist development of India. Kuusinen, on the other hand, while maintaining a formally correct position on the character of imperialist policy, was driven to uphold an absurd position on the role of the bourgeoisie in the national movement. His confusion was brought out in his concluding remarks: 'The fact that there exists an objective and even profound contradiction between the class interests of the national bourgeoisie and imperialism, and that this bourgeoisie has its own political main line which is not without significance, does not at all mean that it is capable of representing its objective class interest in a more consistent, more independent manner. The national bourgeoisie of the colonies is not able to do this ...' [100]

These confusions were symptomatic. They offer a first insight into the 'theoretical' mistake of the Sixth Congress on the question of the political character of the Indian bourgeoisie. Without exception all the delegates and speakers, from those with the sophistication (in such matters) of Bukharin to others with the mechanical dullness of Arnol, sought to deny either the economic or the political autonomy of the Indian bourgeoisie. Of course this autonomy was only a relative one, but it was real nonetheless. It was the one underlying factor which not only made it possible for the Indian bourgeoisie to impose its hegemony on the national movement but even compelled it to do so. As long as the national capitalists retained and even expanded their own autonomous base within the economy — and during the Depression and Second World War there was considerable expansion in this direction — there could be no question of the bourgeoisie finally compromising with imperialism, betraying the national movement, giving up the goal of independence. For the independence at stake was precisely the future of the Indian bourgeoisie as an independent ruling class with the political means to determine its economic destiny. Independence, in the consciousness of this class, signified a radical shift in its class position, from dependence on a state apparatus reflecting metropolitan interests and political subordination to this apparatus, to control of its own state apparatus.

#### The Question of the National Bourgeoisie

In fact there were several factors which precluded this almost obvious vision of the Indian bourgeoisie. For one thing, the main phase in the consolidation of its economic power was still to come. However, the initial determining circumstance was the fact that the criminal ineptitude of the Stalin line of alliance with the Kuomintang was dramatically exposed by the course of the class struggle in China itself. When first published, *Palme Dutt's Modern India* had advocated a regroupment of the left-nationalist elements within Congress and the Swaraj Party around a 'populational programme'. In the English edition issued late in 1926, after the official policy imposed on the CCP had begun to disintegrate, partly under the strain of Trotsky's attacks, Dutt declared, 'the Indian bourgeoisie is today a counter-revolutionary force; they fear the social revolution that would follow on national independence more than they desire independence' [101]. This kind of totally pragmatic volte face would of course become quite characteristic of Dutt and his sort in later years. Here was an early example of it, caused not by any sharp turn of events within India during 1926, but by the shifts and vacillations of Comintern policy

93. Kuusinen, *Degras*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 538.

94. *Ibid.*

95. Murphy, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

96. *Degras*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 540.

97. *Meerut Conspiracy Case*, pp. 81, 82-3.

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

99. S. Tagore, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

100. Kuusinen, *Inprecor*, 21/11/28.

101. Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit., p. 84.

under the pressure of events in China. Nonetheless, it was still possible as late as December 1927 for Luhan to predict a sharpening of the contradiction between imperialism and the bourgeoisie: 'The political concessions which British imperialism is in a position to make are not of a nature to satisfy the Indian bourgeoisie' [102].

It is clear that the hardening of attitudes which could be witnessed through 1928 was determined primarily by the fact that in China a 'national' bourgeoisie, which at one stage had even received the support of the Comintern, had by that stage 'deserted' the revolution and left Stalin's policy in ridiculous shambles, at the cost of the liquidation of the proletarian vanguard in Shanghai and Canton. In India no decisive swing to the right on the part of the bourgeoisie could be deciphered either in 1926 or in 1927 to justify Dutt's new characterisation. Nor were the events of 1922 of any determining significance, for even after the retreat there had been no question of denouncing the bourgeoisie or Congress as 'counter-revolutionary'. Thus in 1922 Roy had written to Indian Communists advocating penetration of Congress on an entrant basis; they were told not to 'part company with the National Congress but bid for its leadership' [103]. In June 1923 Roy wrote to C.R. Das calling on him to 'rally all the available revolutionary elements within and without Congress' [104]. In the same month, more significantly, the ECCI sent a message to the projected WPP which stated, 'the political party of the workers and peasants must act in cooperation with, and give fullest support to, the bourgeois parties insofar as they struggle against imperialism in some way or other' [105]. Again in March 1925, in its report to the Fifth Plenum of the ECCI, the Colonial Commission argued that it was 'necessary for the Communists to continue working in the National Congress and in the left wing of the Swaraj Party ...' [106] Finally, late in 1926, a 'Manifesto to the All-India National Congress' published on behalf of the CPI appealed to Congress to adopt a radical programme. Also late in 1926, Petrovsky, the Comintern representative in London, had apparently told Spratt to write a pamphlet on China urging India to follow the example of the Kuomintang. [107]

This kind of statement was of course no longer possible after July 1927. That was the month in which the ECCI decided finally that the 'revolutionary role' of the (left-KMT) Wuhan Government had been 'played out'; it is becoming a counter-revolutionary force'. 'In Canton, Shanghai, Chansha, and now in Wuhan, the standard bearers of the "revolutionary Kuomintang" had changed from steering allies of the revolution into cruel butchers of the revolution.' [108] The transposition of this shift to a quite different conjuncture in India — where all the signs were that the bourgeoisie would move the other way — took time to unfold. In January 1928, some six months after the 'desertion' of the left Kuomintang, Roy, whose own role in China was of no small significance, wrote in *Inprecor* that the bourgeois nationalist parties in India were not only 'politically bankrupt' but 'counter-revolutionary' as well. [109] In June the same year, now almost a year after the decisive turn in China, Palme Dutt wrote: 'In general, and on all fundamental questions, the role of the Indian bourgeoisie since the collapse of the Non-Cooperation Movement has evolved in the direction of becoming more and more clearly counter-revolutionary'. [110] Why, in that case, had the ECCI advocated the 'fullest support' to 'bourgeois parties' in 1923? Why, even three years later, had it bothered to appeal to Congress to adopt a radical programme?

At the Sixth Congress the following month, Dutt's transposed ultra-leftism was encountered quite frequently. At the Twenty-Fifth Session one of the delegates described Gandhi as an 'agent of British imperialism' [111]. Arnol at a later session concluded his speech with the view that the Indian bourgeoisie must now 'be regarded as a camp of counter-revolution' [112], and Dutt in his intervention referred to the 'present bourgeois counter-revolutionary

revolution (I) in India'. As no recent events were at hand to substantiate this strange view, he went back in time to the bourgeoisie's 'historic betrayal at Bardoli in 1922' [113]. 'It is our primary task to expose and explain the counter-revolutionary character of the nationalist reformist Indian bourgeoisie.' This description now acquired the character of a ritual incantation. Bennett followed Dutt, also referring to the 'counter-revolutionary role of the Indian bourgeoisie' [114]. An Indian delegate at the next session excelled even these pathetic interventions: 'We must not attach any considerable importance to the so-called nationalist movements in the colonies, as the history of this movement is the history of servile capitulation before the imperialist forces'. This delegate saw no inconsistency in going on to state a few lines later that as long as India was ruled by Britain there could be 'no free development of the natural resources of India, much less of industry' [115]. Two sessions later, another member of the same delegation argued, 'the bourgeoisie are not revolutionaries (!) but decidedly counter-revolutionary because they betray even the political independence movement'. Gandhi was again described as 'an agent of imperialism' [116]. Finally, Luhaci asserted, with an admirable grasp of 'dialectics', that the Indian bourgeoisie was 'a potential if not already an actual counter-revolutionary force...' [117].

But if this shift had been determined in its initial stages by the events in China and the revised conception of the Kuomintang, in its later stages it gained a certain 'credibility' from events in India itself. For it was at the Calcutta Congress in 1928 that the demand for 'complete independence' of the previous year was temporarily displaced by talk of 'Dominion Status'. The ECCI described this in July 1929 as 'an undisguised betrayal of the cause of national independence by the Indian bourgeoisie' [118]. Towards the end of the same year the League Against Imperialism wrote in the Comintern press that 'British agents still dominate the Congress'. The following month a letter was published addressed to the youth, workers and peasants of India: 'Sever your contact with the National Congress and the League for Independence... Disclose their falseness and treachery... Show them up for what they are as assistants of British imperialism in India.' [119] Around the same time Dutt denounced Gandhi as 'a police agent of British imperialism in India' [120], and towards the end of the year the 'Draft Platform of Action of the CPI' characterised Congress as 'a class organisation of the capitalists' and called for 'ruthless war on the left-nationalist reformists' [121]. Early the following year this line was developed even further. An article in the Comintern's theoretical journal wrote that even Communists were confused about the Congress, whose programme, however, 'completely corresponds to the interests of British imperialism' [122]. Only two months before, however, *Inprecor* had

102. *Inprecor*, 27/12/27.

103. Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit., p. 46.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

105. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 52.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

107. Mentioned in *Ibid.*, p. 85.

108. Cf. H. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 286.

109. Roy, *Inprecor*, 5/1/28.

110. Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit., pp. 108-9.

111. *Sur*, *Inprecor*, 25/9/28.

112. Arnol, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

113. Dutt, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

114. Bennett, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

115. Raza, *Inprecor*, 8/11/28.

116. *Sur*, *Inprecor*, 8/11/28.

117. Luhan, *Inprecor*, 21/11/28.

118. *Degras*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 45.

119. *Inprecor*, 27/12/29; Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit., p. 140.

120. *Degras*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 90.

121. Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit., pp. 145f.

122. *Degras*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 156.

carried an article in which it had been stated, for information, that some 40,000 Congressmen were at that time languishing in overcrowded jails. And, of course, from the middle of 1930 imperialism had brutally intensified its physical assaults on the followers of this party, whose programme was supposed to correspond only to its own interests! Again, in February 1931, before the Gandhi-Irwin pact, *Inprecor* described Congress as 'developing in the direction of passing over to the side of imperialism and counter-revolution' [123]. After the pact with Irwin and the Second Round Table Conference, it seemed almost 'obvious' that the directing committee of the Congress had become 'an open agent of British imperialism', as the League Against Imperialism announced [124].

But neither the events in China nor the vacillations of the Congress leadership before imperialism by themselves explain the pronounced, almost exaggerated character of the ultra-leftism of this period (1929-31), for the new policy regarding Congress as 'in the camp of the counter-revolution' was part of the general shift in policy to the line of the Third Period inaugurated by the ECCP's Tenth Plenum in the middle of 1929. On the analogy of denouncing European social democracy as the 'left' face of fascism, the theory of 'social fascism', the nationalist parties in the colonial world were transformed into the 'left' face of imperialism. This elimination of political frontiers would have especially tragic consequences in Germany, where it precluded the only basis on which the working class could have fought and defeated fascism in the early 1930s — through the policy of a united front between the Communist and Social Democratic workers which Trotsky tirelessly advocated. In the ossified brains of the Comintern's propagandists (Molotov, Mamulsky, Pyatnitsky, Togliatti, Thorez, Cachin, Kuusinen) Germany, in 1931, was 'already living under fascist rule'; 'Hitler could not make matters worse than they were under Brüning...' Trotsky wrote: 'Beneath this pseudo-radical verbiage hides the most sordid passivity... You are blundering disgracefully because you are afraid of the difficulties that lie ahead.' [125]

The distinguishing feature of 'Third Periodism' in India, however, was that in a sense it had started already almost two years before the Tenth Plenum. Already late in 1927 Roy was writing that, at the next National Session, Congress was going 'to declare peace with British imperialism. The bourgeoisie is not only withdrawing themselves from the national revolution; the withdrawal is but a prelude to a definite stand against the national revolution.' [126] In April 1928 Roy repeated, 'the bourgeoisie with all its elements from right to left are drifting away from the main current of the national-revolutionary struggle' [127]. As we have seen, by the middle of 1928 this position was a consolidated one: speaker after speaker denounced Congress as an agent of imperialism and the bourgeoisie as counter-revolutionary. Thus the formal announcement of the Third Period with the policy of imminent collapse of capitalism and the theory of social fascism merely prolonged the turn to ultra-leftism in India. Nor were its practical effects as openly disastrous as in Germany or in China, where the policy inaugurated a period of putschism under Li Li-san's leadership. For one thing, the Indian Communists were not anywhere as well organised or as strong as the KPD and CCP. As a centralised organisation they were non-existent, and even their 'indirect' hold on sections of the working class through the medium of the WPP was not of very great significance. It became of even less significance once the latter organisation, already denounced at the Sixth Congress by Kuusinen and others, was formally abolished at the Tenth Plenum and effectively ceased to exist once its leadership was interned by the Meerut District Magistrate. Nevertheless, the Third Period policy merely accentuated the already backward development of Indian Communism, and thus helped to postpone its expansion for about seven years, till 1935.

#### The Comintern and Bourgeois Nationalism

Corresponding to the Comintern's failure to grasp the relative but real economic and political autonomy of the Indian bourgeoisie was its radically mistaken understanding of the strategy of bourgeois nationalism in India. These errors were strictly complementary, for a correct understanding of the latter presupposed some understanding of the former. An early example of this incomprehension was an article by E. Roy in *Inprecor* in 1925, where she wrote: 'So strong is the spirit of class interest and so selfish the leadership of the movement [emphasis mine — JB] that the prospects of freedom are deliberately jeopardised by a policy of compromise and concession. The Indian bourgeoisie is selling the birthright of the Indian people for a mess of pottage secured to themselves by bargaining with the imperial overlord....' [128] Almost with despair several years later, when on trial, the Indian Communist leadership would assert, with reference to Congress, 'the real situation is that they do not want that which could be obtained by violence, namely, the overthrow of British rule' [129]. In keeping with this notion it was sometimes argued, whenever there was a shift in the balance of forces within the Congress leadership to the left, or a resumption of the mass movement, that these were empty gestures, manoeuvres of hypocrisy. Thus, early in 1928, Roy wrote of the 'independence resolution' passed at the previous Congress that it had 'no practical value' [130]. Coming back to the subject in August, he said, with reference to the same resolution, 'those with a better understanding of the situation and of the class composition of the Congress leadership were sceptical. In this resolution they saw only a manoeuvre of the bourgeois leaders to retain their control over the radical petty bourgeoisie.' [131] With reference to the same subject, Kuusinen declared at the Sixth Congress, 'pressure from below makes the bourgeoisie indulge in oppositional gestures' [132]. Likewise the Meerut prisoners with reference to another Congress two years later: 'At the Karachi Congress the Independence Resolution was again passed. But the line taken by the Congress leaders since then, and especially their attendance at the Round Table Conference, has shown again that it was not seriously meant [emphasis mine — JB]... It is obvious [emphasis mine — JB] that people who can vote for Complete Independence one year and Dominion Status the next year do not attach any serious meaning at all to "Independence"... Independence to the ordinary Congress leader is a "phrase" with which to keep the rank and file contented, and perhaps to threaten the Government...' [133] Finally, there was the notion that even if the bourgeoisie was 'serious' about independence, it could never win independence. Again Roy and the Meerut Communists exemplified this view. Roy argued, 'the policy of imperialism is economic concessions but political suppression. Imperialism can afford to make some concessions... only in case it maintains the monopoly of political power... it has become brutally clear that the reformist programme of bourgeois nationalism is not realisable. The petty bourgeois Congress Party... stands exposed in its naive impotence. The resolution of the Madras Congress is only a stratagem to hide this total political bankruptcy.' [134] During the Meerut trial the leadership argued similarly that, 'the general line of

policy of imperialism is such as to give no basis for a compromise at all satisfactory to the desires of advancement of the Indian bourgeoisie... We conclude that there is no objective basis for a lasting compromise really satisfactory to the aspirations of the Indian bourgeoisie... There is no objective basis for a final compromise.' [135] In short, in addition to all their other mistakes, they also thought that bourgeois independence was impossible.

In none of the analyses we have cited was there the slightest trace of a Marxist analysis. The determining 'theoretical' concepts sprang from a problematic of psychological subjects — the Indian bourgeoisie was 'selfish', it allowed the 'spirit' of class interest to interfere with its leadership of the national movement, it was not really 'serious' about the goal of independence, its shifts to the left were 'sham' gestures, 'hypocritical' stratagems, and finally it was a 'naive', even 'stupid' bourgeoisie. Thus Freier discussing Kuusinen's report: 'In India the industrial development of the country has reached a point when further progress is possible only by destroying the imperialist-federal fetters which shackle the productive forces of the country. Even the native bourgeoisie is beginning to understand this, at least to a certain extent.' [136] Here, then, was a bourgeoisie which according to Kuusinen was incapable of representing its own objective class interests; according to Freier, in the first stages of realising that India's economic development presupposed the expulsion of imperialism; according to Roy, naive enough to imagine that bourgeois independence was possible; and according to Roy's wife, selfish enough to make it impossible!

The dominant model which provided the framework for the Comintern's analyses of the Indian bourgeoisie was, however, a Chinese one. It was the experience of the national movement in China which guided Roy and others when they sought to understand the significance of shifts in the Indian conjuncture. It was the 'treachery' of the Indian bourgeoisie which impressed them most. The archetype of this bourgeoisie was Chiang Kai-shek the 'traitor'. The motif is easily traceable. In July 1930 *Inprecor* claimed that the Congress under the direction of Gandhi was 'just like the Kuomintang of China. Both are the tools of imperialism.' [137] The CP leadership in the same period argued in court: 'Our estimate of the position of the Indian national bourgeoisie is confirmed also by the events of the Chinese Revolution, which affords in some ways a fairly close parallel to Indian history [emphasis mine — JB]' [138] In November of that year (1930), V. Chattopadhyaya, displacing Roy in the pages of *Inprecor*, said, 'the present policy of the Congress is to become a Kuomintang with: the object of establishing an Indian Nanking with the blood of the workers and peasants'. [139] The following year an appeal from the organisation Chattopadhyaya ran in Berlin, the League Against Imperialism, repeated, 'the Congress has now abandoned the fight against the foreign imperialists, just as Chiang Kai-shek had done in China...' [140] Some months later, Smeral referred to 'the complete going over of the Indian bourgeoisie to the path of Chiang Kai-shek', referring to the Karachi Congress. [141] The same writer a few months later again made the analogy: 'There is no going back for the Gandhists after the agreements which Gandhi concluded with the Viceroy... They must follow the path of betrayal up to the end, just as the Kuomintang and Chiang Kai-shek have done in China.' This, according to Smeral, was a 'historical law'. [142]

Failing to grasp the strategy of bourgeois nationalism, the Comintern took every short-term compromise as a 'final' abandonment of the national struggle, every temporary shift to the right as the last act of treachery against national independence. Conversely, a shift to the left no longer had any credibility. This could only be the reflex of 'pressure from below' or a 'stratagem', a 'manoeuvre' of its 'false', 'insincere' leaders (all these phrases were used). There was, then, a radical misunderstanding of the depth of the contradiction which had developed between imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie after the First World War, and a failure to keep the long-term

character of this contradiction in mind when attempting to interpret the vacillatory movement of the national struggle. The methodology of the Third Period was profoundly empiricist, and supported now by a psychological, problematic, now by a mechanical analogy. The abandonment of Marxist method was integral to the political retreat signified by the Third Period.

#### The Comintern and the Solidity of Indian Nationalism

Confronted by the tragic spectacle of this retreat before the jackboots of Nazism, Trotsky had written: 'The first quality of a truly revolutionary party is the ability to face realities.' At no stage did the Comintern pose the question of the specific strength of bourgeois nationalism in India. This would have required an analysis of 'national peculiarities' for which, however, there was no room in a methodology of pragmatic reactions and transposed solutions.

It is true that Trotsky himself, for example in 1924, had been prone to a similar impressionism. At the Fifth Comintern Congress he had said of the situation in India, 'the parties of national liberalism and petty bourgeois utopias are melting into the void...' But in 1924 such an illusion was excusable.

This, after all, was the low point of the recession, the period of transition from mass struggle to constitutional entry, the period of Gandhi's retirement from politics. At this stage the backward development of the Communist Party might have been excused, it might have been taken as a birthpang. On the assumption that such a party would grow rapidly in the next three years, as indeed it did in China, the situation was promising. In *Inprecor*, E. Roy referred to the 'complete and final defeat of orthodox Gandhism' [143], and there was indeed no means of telling at that stage that this was not so. The question of who would lead the working class and peasantry in the next stage of struggle still hung in the balance.

One or two years later the Comintern theoretical journal contained an article which made reference to 'the continuous process of the political decomposition of bourgeois nationalist organisations', referring specifically to India [144]. In 1928, however, this type of analysis was no longer feasible. Nevertheless, M.N. Roy stated that 'the outstanding feature of the nationalist movement during this year has been the process of class differentiation' and, developing this line of thought, wrote early in 1929 that, despite the defeat at the 1928 Congress, this process was bound to result in a struggle for leadership of the nationalist movement and that the rank and file were 'bound to move still further to the left — towards the formation of a revolutionary democratic anti-imperialist united front'. [145] But 1929 was precisely the year when Gandhi blocked such a process with an easy display of tactical skill — winning Nehru over and simultaneously coming forward as the champion of 'independence'. Bose wrote that 'by this process of assimilation the Gandhi movement was able to maintain its progressive character and prevent the emergence of any big left-wing development'. [146] Again, if we revert to 1928, in the middle of that year an ECCP report had said, in the section on India, 'it is no longer possible for the bourgeois parties to force themselves on the masses as the leaders of the national-revolutionary struggle'. But it was, as Congress proved several times in the following years. [147]

123. G.S., *Inprecor*, 26/2/31.  
124. League Against Imperialism, *Inprecor*, 24/9/31.  
125. Cited in I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast — Trotsky 1929-40* (OUP, 1970), p. 137.  
126. Roy, cited in Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit., p. 102.  
127. *Ibid.*, p. 107.  
128. E. Roy, *Inprecor*, 7/5/25.  
129. Meerut Conspiracy, p. 86. They go on to say, 'but for whatever reason, they have incessantly preached non violence' (emphasis mine — JB).  
130. Roy, *Inprecor*, 5/11/28.  
131. Roy, *Inprecor*, 24/8/28.  
132. Kuusinen, *Inprecor*, 4/10/28.  
133. Meerut Conspiracy, p. 85.  
134. Roy, *Inprecor*, 5/11/28.

135. Meerut Conspiracy, p. 85.  
136. Freier, *Inprecor*, 11/9/29.  
137. Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit., p. 145.  
138. Meerut Conspiracy, p. 87.  
139. *Inprecor*, 6/11/30.  
140. League Against Imperialism, *Inprecor*, 19/3/31.  
141. Smeral, *Inprecor*, 2/4/31.  
142. Smeral, *Inprecor*, 27/8/31.  
143. E. Roy, *Inprecor*, 19/7/24. Trotsky's remark in Degras, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 116.  
144. Communist International, 19287.  
145. Roy, *Inprecor*, 27/12/28, 18/11/29.  
146. Bose, op. cit., p. 396.  
147. Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit., p. 109.

The tendency to underestimate the strength of Congress, the solidity of its relationship to the masses — particularly the urban petty bourgeoisie and peasantry — was distinctly visible in the 'Thesis' of the WPP issued at its national conference late in 1928. This document saw the Nehru Report as a 'retreat' before imperialism, and took it to signify 'a consolidation of the whole bourgeoisie class... into a single reactionary bloc, completely divorced from the masses' [148]. It is paradoxical that this document was published in an issue of *Labour Monthly* which reprinted one of Roy's articles in which Bipin Chandra Pal was quoted as saying, 'it is no longer possible to describe the Congress as a demonstration of mere middle class discontent... It can no longer be said that the educated classes in India have no backing in their political struggle from the masses of the people'. Perhaps because by this stage he had been discredited, Roy's articles were not read very carefully. The conclusion seems inevitable, for barely four months later in the same journal Clemens Dutt was writing, 'taken as a whole the bourgeois nationalist movement is on the decline, because it can no longer lead the struggle of the whole nation' [149]. Dutt too had in mind the Nehru Report, which he described as a 'reversion to liberalism'. As Roy had done in 1928, Dutt in 1929 emphasised the growing 'cleavage' within the ranks of Congress between its 'pro-bourgeois' and 'pro-working class' wings. This theory of 'differentiation' was repeated yet again the following year, this time by Chattopadhyaya, who wrote with remarkable optimism, 'there is no doubt that the official leaders will soon find themselves isolated' [150]. More significant, however, was a contribution to *Imprecor* which appeared nine months later, signed G.S.: 'Some comrades think that the overwhelming preponderance of the Congress is a wall which cannot be broken down...' [151]. This parenthesis reflected a truer grasp of the situation than the detailed analyses of Roy and Chattopadhyaya.

Parallel to this, but less importantly, there was a tendency to underestimate the economic strength of the Indian bourgeoisie, its relative autonomy in the sphere of investment. Thus as early as 1921, in his report to the Third Congress, Trotsky argued that the native bourgeoisie's struggle against imperialism could not be 'either consistent or energetic inasmuch as the native bourgeoisie itself is intimately bound up with foreign capital and represents to a large measure an agency of foreign capital' [152]. This may have been true of some of the nascent bourgeoisies of the colonial world, and was partially true of the Chinese bourgeoisie, but its application to the Indian bourgeoisie was more remote. Trotsky never lost this illusion, for as late as 1939 in his letter to the workers of India he explained the 'compromising' character of the Indian bourgeoisie in terms of the fact that they were 'closely bound up with British capitalism' [153]. The CP leaders stated in their trial that the Indian bourgeoisie was too weak to lead the struggle against imperialism because their interests were 'bound up too closely with... British imperialism' [154]. A curious final example is Nehru himself, who in his speech at Calcutt in May 1928 made a similar assertion: 'The Indian capitalists are bound hand and foot with British capitalists and Indian industries are undoubtedly run with 90 per cent of British capital and 10 per cent of Indian capital. Protection of Indian industry means protection of British capital.' [155] This statement in itself says more about the strength of the national movement in India than any argument one could propose. It demonstrates the margin of autonomy which bourgeois democracy possessed vis-à-vis the 'narrow' interests of the capitalist class.

The pages of *Imprecor* are littered with another illusion, the reverse of the first one — the illusion that the fierce combativity of the Indian working class in 1928 was the prelude to its rapid politicisation and assumption of a hegemonic role. This illusion was especially harmful as it failed to focus on the special characteristics of the position of the working class in that period — its economic weakness in the face of retrenchment and the fact that there was no centralised



M.N. ROY

functioning CP to which it could turn. Ironically the first of these facts was brought out by Luhani in an article on the strike situation in India in 1928: 'By coming out on strike, workers face instantaneous death from bullets or slow death from starvation in the distant villages to which they must return in default of work.' [156]. The following year Clemens Dutt was writing in *Labour Monthly* in the following terms: 'The trial of the 31 Indian working class leaders at Meerut... remains the most important event of the period in India, giving the truest indication of what is happening there... The Meerut trial reveals and expresses the new stage of acuter class antagonisms... The big strike movement in India during the last 18 months has been only one sign of the new period characterised by the emergence of the proletariat as an independent political force... In spite of the hammer blow directed against it, the Indian proletariat is not only unsubdued but is still advancing.' [157] Two months earlier Spratt had written that the Indian proletariat were 'in the front rank', but did not specify of what exactly [158].

148. The document is reproduced in *Labour Monthly*, March 1929.
149. Clemens Dutt, *Labour Monthly*, July 1929.
150. *Imprecor*, 28/8/30.
151. G.S., *Imprecor*, 26/2/31.
152. *First Five Years of the Comintern*, p. 223.
153. 'An Open Letter to the Workers of India', *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1928-38* (Merit Publishers, 1969), p. 37.
154. *Meerut Conspiracy*, p. 83, cf. p. 69.
155. *Selected Works*, p. 243.
156. Luhani, *Imprecor*, 31/5/28.
157. C. Dutt, *Labour Monthly*, July 1929.
158. Spratt, *Labour Monthly*, May 1929.

Such ultra-optimistic reports recurred time and again in 1929-31. P. Sch writing in March 1929: 'The Indian working class has reached such a level of maturity that the White Terror will not be able to get the better of it... The revolution in India is developing quite in accordance with "prescribed rules"'. [159] Arnot in April 1929: 'The heroic five-month textile strike ended in October with the workers undefeated in spirit and ready to resist any attack of the employers.' [160] Kuusinen in July: 'There are unmistakable signs of the maturing of a revolutionary situation' (let us recall Lenin's definition of such a situation) [161]. Lozovsky at the same Plenum: 'We can see the approach of revolution there', referring to India [162]. Chabr in April 1930: 'The futility of Gandhi's tactics of non-violence becomes obvious to the masses.' [163] The All-India Anti-Imperialist League in February 1931: 'The disillusionment of the masses is progressing rapidly. They are rapidly realising that whatever sham fight the Congress is putting up is only to serve the class interests of the capitalists and the landlords... They now understand that they cannot overthrow the system of British imperialism with the weapons of Gandhism...'. [164] Smeral in April 1931: 'As a result of the executions in Lahore [of Bhagat Singh and his comrades — JB] large and important sections of the population are being freed from Gandhism and brought to revolutionary consciousness... Everybody in India can now see that everything that Gandhi and Nehru have done in the past year... was nothing else but a preparation for the deliberate betrayal of the Indian national revolution.' [165] Clemens Dutt in September 1931: 'There are clear signs that the masses are already in increasing measure escaping from the ideological ascendancy of the Congress leadership.' [166] Clemens Dutt in October: 'In spite of Gandhi, in spite of the National Congress, the mass struggle in India cannot be subdued.' [167] This strange mentality persisted vigorously from 1928 to the end of 1931. Not only was it not based on any concrete understanding of the balance of forces in India or of the strategy of bourgeois nationalism, but it reflected the crudest impressionism and bad faith. It is perhaps not accidental that none of these writers had ever had any direct experience of a strike struggle in the factories of Bombay or Calcutta during the trade depression when, as Luhani had said, the alternatives were starvation or the firing squad, when resistance to wage cuts was generally ineffective and redundancies on the increase.

#### The Degeneration of the Comintern

'For them the Congress leaders really do not want the British to go away', wrote Nehru of the Communists in India. 'It is surprising that able Communists should believe this fantastic analysis, but believing this as they apparently do, it is not surprising that they should fail so remarkably in India. Their basic error seems to be that they judge the Indian national movement from European labour standards; and, used as they are to the repeated betrayals of the labour movement by the labour leaders, they apply the analogy to India.' [168] The framework in terms of which the nascent Communist Party in India approached and understood the national movement during the renewed radicalisation of 1928-32 was a transformation of the theory of 'social-fascism'. Both in Germany and in India in this period, despite their radically different conjunctures, the absence of any significant political intervention by the proletariat resulted from an identical omission: in both instances what was missing was any Leninist concept of the united front. At the Third Congress of the International in 1921, Lenin and Trotsky had had to defend the concept vigorously against the ultra-radicalism of the German, Italian and Dutch parties. For the European parties in that period of temporary stabilisation of capitalism the concept implied that 'marching separately Communists and reformists should strike jointly at the bourgeoisie whenever they were threatened by it or could wrest concessions from it... the

main arena of the united front lay outside parliament... the Communists had to pursue a double objective: they should seek to secure the immediate success of the united front, and at the same time assert their own viewpoint within the united front...'. [169] In the Third Period Trotsky alone defended the application of this strategy to the situation in Germany — against the pseudo-radicalism of the Stalinists. But the 'fighting unity' which he advocated through the temporary alliance of Communist and Social Democratic workers did not materialise. 'One of the decisive moments in history is approaching', Trotsky said, 'when the Comintern as a revolutionary factor may be wiped off the political map for an entire historic epoch.' Such an epoch was in the process of dawning.

The concept underlying Lenin's theses on the bourgeois democratic movement in backward countries was in all essentials the united front concept. 'Patiently Lenin replied to Roy, explaining that for a longer or shorter period of time the Indian Communist Party would be a small party with but few members, having only weak resources, incapable of reaching, on the basis of its programme and by means of its own activity, a substantial number of peasants and workers. On the other hand, on the basis of demands for national independence it would become possible to mobilise large masses... and it was only in the course of this struggle that the Indian Communist Party would forge and develop its organisation to the point where it would be in a position... to attack the Indian bourgeoisie.' [170] To Lenin it was inconceivable that the tiny Communist Parties of the colonial countries could find any circuit of expansion outside the struggle for independence, outside the sphere, in other words, of the bourgeois liberation movements in the colonies — as long as such an opening existed and the exponents of those movements (for example, Congress in India) did not 'hinder our work of educating and organising the peasantry and the broad mass of the exploited in a revolutionary spirit' [171]. There is no doubt that in the late Twenties, as subsequently, such an opening existed in India. In January 1929, a month after the WPP conference, Nehru had written to Chattopadhyaya complaining that 'the WPP at their meeting in Calcutta decided not to permit their members to join the Independence for India League. This was not a very wise decision, I think. Various other factors too have gone to weaken the League.' [172] Bose registered a similar complaint. [173] Of course, neither Bose nor Nehru were revolutionary Marxists, nor was Congress an organisation capable of carrying through a revolutionary fight against imperialism. But this had never been the basis on which a front with the various currents of reformism, in their imperialist or colonial refractions, had been justified. The sole justification was that only through such an alliance could the party of the proletariat expand its own resources, establish a wide platform for its views, and make significant interventions in mass struggles. The function of the united front had never been the strengthening of (imperialist or colonial) social democracy, but the utilisation of the possibilities it offered in a given conjuncture to further the independent class standpoint of the proletariat.

159. Sch, *Imprecor*, 29/3/19.
160. Arnot, *Imprecor*, 5/4/29.
161. Kuusinen, *Imprecor*, 20/8/29.
162. Lozovsky, *Imprecor*, 11/9/29.
163. Chabr, *Imprecor*, 17/4/30.
164. AIAL, *Imprecor*, 5/2/31.
165. Smeral, *Imprecor*, 2/4/31.
166. Dutt, *Imprecor*, 17/8/31.
167. Dutt, *Imprecor*, 1/10/31.
168. Norman, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-2.
169. *Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed — Trotsky 1921-29*, pp. 83.
170. Alfred Roamer, cited Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p. 32. Roamer was in Moscow quite frequently in this period.
171. V.I. Lenin, 'The Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions', in *Lenin on the National and Colonial Question* (Peking, 1967).
172. *Selected Works*, p. 297, letter dated 23/1/29.
173. Bose, *op. cit.*, p. 350.



But in India there were other weaknesses, not the least important being the absence of any implantation in the countryside. Again Lenin had insisted in the amended version of his theses that 'it would be utopian to believe that proletarian parties, if indeed they can emerge in these backward countries, could pursue communist tactics and a communist policy without establishing definite relations with the peasant movement and without giving it effective support'. But if the Indian Communists were weak in the cities, they were even weaker in the countryside. Their links with the peasantry were non-existent. It was left to Nehru to point this out: 'Communists in India .... have little knowledge of, or contact with, the rural areas .... Congress workers, on the other hand, have spread all over the rural areas.' [174]

Confronting an already strong bourgeoisie and a colonial state apparatus, misguided by Comintern policies whose shifts they barely understood, and isolated from the peasantry, the Communists in India were doomed to remain a backward insignificant force throughout the main course of the national movement. When their forces did begin a slow expansion in the middle Thirties, this was no longer on the basis of any independent class policy. For the strategy of the Popular Front, officially adopted at the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935, was in no sense an application of the united front concept. The latter had presupposed that within the alliance with reformism the proletariat would maintain its class independence; the essence of the Popular Front line was the subordination of the class interests of the proletariat to bourgeois democracy, the threatened bourgeois democracy of France and England and the nascent bourgeois democracy of the colonies. In India the shift was visible quite early. Thus in June 1922 Inprecor had referred to the 'turning point' in the national movement, admitting that 'the bourgeois National Congress has so far succeeded in maintaining influence over considerably wide masses of the workers'. The CP's biggest mistake was that it 'stood aside from the mass movement of the people against British imperialism' [175]. In February the following year the same point was repeated. By 1935 the reversal was open. At the Seventh Congress it was the hardline Stalinist, Wang Ming (alias Chen Shao-yu), who emerged as the chief spokesman on colonial questions. Recommending to the CPI the example of the Brazilian and British CPs, he added: 'Our comrades in India have suffered for a long time from left-sectarian errors; they did not participate in all the mass demonstrations organised by the National Congress and affiliated organisations.' [176] The following year Inprecor published an article written jointly by Palme Dutt and Bradley which saw in Congress 'the united front of the Indian people in the national struggle .... It is even possible that the National Congress, by the further transformation of its organisation and programme, may become the form of realisation of the Anti-Imperialist People's Front ....' [177]. Needless to say, there was no attempt to explain how the character of this organisation had undergone such a radical change since 1928 or 1931, when the leadership of Congress were called 'agents of imperialism' and 'counter-revolutionary'.

But by this stage in the history of the Comintern such reversals were a common occurrence — they required no justification. Stalinists like Dutt could always refer to shifts in the objective situation to justify any and every grotesque turn dictated by the Kremlin bureaucracy. There were few parties in the world which went in for such turns with a more nauseating display of blindness and loyalty to Stalin than the British and Indian Communist Parties. The entrenched character of Stalinism in the politics and thinking of the latter party were due, in fact, to its late formation. By the time the various Communists in India had finally established a centralised functionary party in 1934-35, the assault against the Left Opposition was already an historic fact. It had occurred between 1925 and 1928. Those events — Trotsky's opposition to Stalin over China, the Left Opposition's

promulgation of an economic programme which the right-centre bloc successfully resisted, the formation of the United Opposition, the heroic demonstration on the Revolution's Tenth Anniversary, attacked by the police, the expulsion of Trotsky and Zinoviev from the party in late 1927, Trotsky's exile in January 1928 — had not the least repercussions on Indian Communism. When the latter constituted itself as a centralised party, it was comparatively homogeneous in its political affiliations. There was no struggle against Trotskyism within the party; as there was in China as late as 1930 and even later during the front with the Kuomintang. Outside the party Trotskyism was an insignificant force. Thus the chief source of challenge to the shifts and turns of the CP leaderships in the 1930s and 1940s was absent in India.

By 1939 the party had come around to attributing a 'progressive role' to Gandhi. The party's labour policy was made to conform to the policy of cooperating with and supporting the Congress Committees. Any attempt to force a militant stand on non-Communist trade union leaderships was described as 'nothing short of disruption' [178]. When the war first broke, the stand was against it as an imperialist war. Three years later, the CC of the CPI would issue a manifesto titled 'India for the Allied Cause', canvassing support for the democratic imperialism of the allies against the fascist imperialism of Germany, while most of the Congress leaders were in jail for their opposition to Indian involvement.

Already in the late 1920s the degeneration of the Comintern was an open fact. By that stage all blunders and mistakes resulting in a defeat of proletarian forces were automatically blamed on the various national leaderships. An early example of this sickening dishonesty relates to Indonesia. When in the spring of 1925 strikes and disturbances erupted in that country, the ECCI drew up a detailed programme for the PKI urging it to advance nationalist rather than proletarian slogans. In November 1927, after the defeat of these upheavals, a further statement was issued by the ECCI condemning the PKI on the following grounds: 'The entire course [of the revolt of 1926-7] showed the lack of serious political and organisational preparation of the movement as a whole. It is highly characteristic that the revolt was conducted under the general slogan of fighting Dutch imperialism, without concrete political and economic slogans ....' [179] It is well known that in the history of the CCP this kind of inverted substitutionism became a common occurrence — with the dismissals of Chen Tu-hsiu, Chu Ch'u-pai and Li Li-san for 'errors' which resulted from a loyal application of the Comintern line. India too offers an example. The Fifth Plenum of the ECCI in 1925 had advised Indian Communists to work inside the National Congress. Later, however, when this organisation had become 'counter-revolutionary', Inprecor published the following attack on Roy: 'From 1919 till 1928 Mr Roy was in charge of the communist movement in India .... Mr Roy, instead of giving proper advice and instructions, misled the workers' representatives by wrong instructions, such as working within the Congress .... His policy of the Communists working within the Congress was calculated to make them a tool in the hands of the compromising and betraying bourgeoisie.' [180]

The degeneration of the Comintern was, however, only a reflection of the collapse of soviet power within Russia itself, of the defeat of those political forces which represented the true interests of the Russian working class — above all, the Left Opposition. After 1925 practically no

174. Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

175. Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

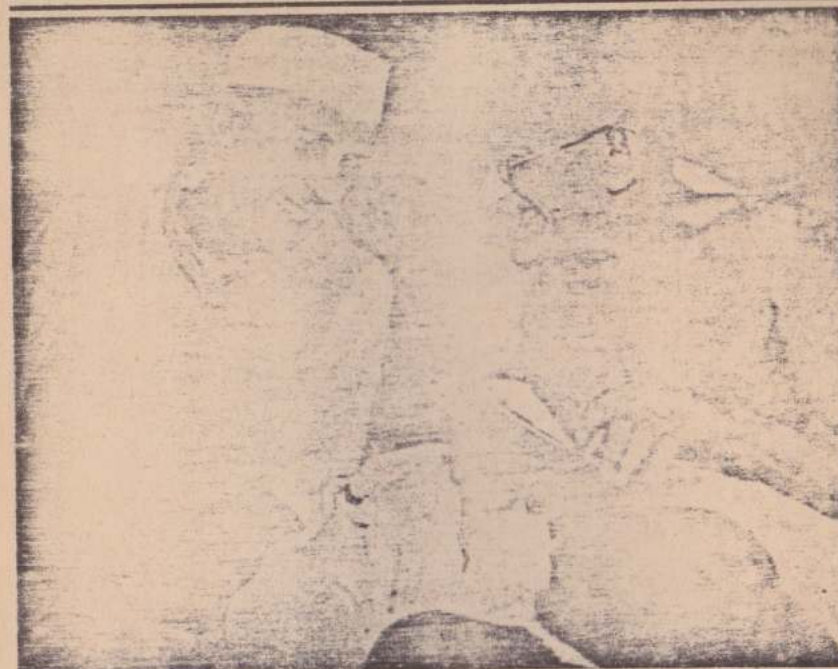
176. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

177. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-60.

178. *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

179. Debras, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 311, 413.

180. Inprecor, 29/10/31.



Congress leaders Nehru and Gandhi

Oppositionists were allowed to state their positions within the forum of the Comintern Congresses. Debates at these Congresses became increasingly stage-managed shows. They no longer reflected the sharp clash of ideas which proletarian democracy inevitably unleashes. It was at this stage in the history of the Comintern that most of the early CP leaders in India established any significant political contacts with it. Before that most of these had been mediated through Roy, who was himself a centrist, unable to break with a politically incorrect line except by relapsing into incorrect and even completely un-Marxist positions. Thus the leadership of Indian Communism had no conception of what the Comintern had been like in the days of Lenin, no conception of its glorious revolutionary past, of its heroic early years, when the whole political outlook and intellectual level of the organisation were radically different from 1928. They had not breathed the atmosphere of those early Congresses when internationalism had still to find its 'Socialist Fatherland'.

#### POSTSCRIPT

The article above was written in 1972-3. If I had to develop the theme today, the basic framework of the analysis would remain, that is, the critique of the Comintern and of its understanding of the logic of the national movement. However, a central thesis that underlies this critique, if only implicitly, namely, the notion that the Permanent Revolution formed a historically viable alternative programme in that period, would have to be drawn out and re-examined much more critically. This notion assumes that the Indian working class of the 1930s and '40s was sufficiently developed to form the social core and political leadership of a revolutionary movement. When we survey the history of

Indian capitalism in retrospect, taking in the years after independence, this assumption becomes much more problematic. To start with, the history of the national movement in India provides not a single example of a generalised working class intervention on the model of Shanghai 1927 or even of Argentina 1945. Of course, working class struggles did erupt periodically, notably in the strikes of the Twenties, but they retained a predominantly economic and local character. In the second place, a substantial modern proletariat would emerge only after independence, with the new period of capital expansion that started in the Fifties. Yet a notable characteristic even of this phase of its development remains its relative political passivity. I do not want to deny, and in fact it would be absurd to do so, that Indian Stalinism played a role, even a major one, in accounting for this prolonged quiescence. It remains true, nonetheless, that the struggles launched, for example, by the railway workers, both before and after independence, constitute an exception confirming an otherwise bleak pattern, and that a properly historical Marxist analysis would have to probe much deeper to draw out phenomena not immediately evident in the straightforward 'politician' critiques of Stalinism — phenomena connected with the historical constitution of the class and with the specific features of this process that were determined by the general evolution of capitalism in India and by the nature of the sort of capitalist democracy (sic) that evolved post-1947. In this sense, the critique of Indian Stalinism proposed in the article remains, to some extent, 'subjectivist' and ahistorical. (Finally, I should like to acknowledge the fairly radical influence exerted on my conception of Indian nationalism by the more recent writings of Bipan Chandra, one example of which is his 'Jawanaria! Nehru and the Capitalist Class, 1936', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, August 1975.)