

Anti-Imperialist Struggle in India

SLOWLY, but surely British domination in India is being undermined. It is true that this historic process is not so speedy as many expected or even prophesied. Nevertheless, the process is going on unceasingly. The depression that followed the sudden collapse of the great Non-co-operation Movement lasted rather long, only to be enlivened, not by an intensified revolutionary activity, but by a concerted effort on the part of the bourgeoisie to challenge the absolute position of Imperialism, on constitutional lines. The development of this new stage has been the outstanding feature of the Indian nationalist struggle during the last twelve months. It has culminated in a political deadlock which has not only nonplussed the nationalist bourgeoisie, but has also placed the British Government in a somewhat uncomfortable position. Some decisive action must be taken from one side or the other to break this deadlock. For the nationalists, it is necessary either to compromise with Imperialism or to go a few steps further towards revolution. Imperialism, on the other hand, is faced with the alternatives: to placate the nationalist bourgeoisie with concessions or to adopt openly the policy of blood and iron. It is likely that the initiative will come from the imperialist side, which to-day does not dare take the latter course lest the seething volcano of popular discontent erupt, and even the timid bourgeoisie will be driven to revolution. A sense of practical politics counsels moderation, if not in word (for the sake of prestige) at least in practice. A slight gesture of generosity will be welcomed by the nationalist bourgeoisie, who will find therein a way out of this deadlock created by themselves. Some administrative reforms, not in the least jeopardising the British supremacy in matters essential, coupled with measures calculated to remove some of the restrictions on the development of native capitalism, will solve the situation. And this is precisely the solution things in India are heading towards.

Should this temporary solution be looked upon with pessimism? Certainly not; because it is but a stage in the process of undermining Imperialism. Historic reasons pre-

vent the Indian bourgeoisie from launching upon a revolutionary path; but at the same time, their very existence is an objective menace to Imperialism. In every compromise made the former win, however beggarly the compromise may be, and the latter gives up a little of its ground. Therefore, a compromise made does not end the antagonism, but simply prepares the ground for another one eventually. One concession is inevitably followed by the demand for another concession. This is certainly a very long and tedious process, and the historic necessity of a National Revolution cannot be circumvented within the narrow limits of this contemptible barter. But the Indian bourgeoisie, as they are situated, do not want to strike a short cut. They are not bold enough to throw down the final challenge and unfurl the flag of revolution.

The Indian bourgeoisie are conspicuous for confusion of political thought and timidity of action. The former is expressed through the intellectual poverty of the nationalist movement and the failure to formulate a comprehensive programme of Nationalism; while the latter causes such a surprising phenomenon as the absence of any faction within the nationalist camp which openly stands for a complete break with the imperial connection. The reason for this confusion of thought and timidity of action is to be sought in the history of the last two hundred years.

Timidity of action is caused by ideological confusion. Objectively, the Indian bourgeoisie are a revolutionary factor; but they are totally unconscious of this revolutionary role of theirs, and what is worse still, they are remarkably inclined towards counter-revolution, or rather, reaction. They desire a politico-economic reconstruction of the country, without disturbing the social *status quo*. This strongly reactionary social character of the Indian bourgeoisie makes them timid in political action, because it does not allow them to countenance any revolutionary upheaval of the masses. They not only fail to undertake the historic role of the bourgeoisie, to lead the serf in the revolutionary fight against feudalism, but, on the contrary, are defenders of the modern forms of the latter that prevail in India. The landed aristocracy—both the scions of the old feudal class as well as that created by British Imperialism in its earlier days—is one of the pillars that supports British rule. By failing to deal a mortal blow to this pillar, the nationalist bourgeoisie separate themselves from the social foundation of a revolutionary movement. This being the case, they find themselves hopelessly

weak when at close grips with the forces of Imperialism. Hence their timidity of action, typified by the absurd programme of ousting British domination by constitutional warfare, and the conspicuous failure of the vanguard of a subject nation to put forth the demand for complete independence.

The struggle of a subject people to free itself from the yoke of foreign domination, however, is not based solely upon the antagonism between the interests of the native bourgeoisie and Imperialism. The objective necessity for the progress of the entire people is the fundamental factor that gives occasion to this struggle. Any social class, that happens at the given period to stand at the vanguard of the entire people, and which gives expression to this objective necessity, automatically becomes the leader of the struggle. Under normal circumstances, therefore, the bourgeoisie should be the leader of the anti-imperialist struggle in India. Up till now, they have been the leaders; but experience has proved their failure to give an account of themselves. They have failed to rise to the situation. Consequently a movement fraught with immense objective revolutionary possibilities, has not developed speedily enough, and Imperialism still appears to prosper, while sitting on the summit of a seething volcano.

To determine the strength or weakness of the Indian nationalist struggle by the action of the bourgeoisie, therefore, would be misleading. The present position of the nationalist bourgeoisie does not indicate the correct revolutionary perspectives in India. On the other hand, it would be equally mistaken to persist in the notion that the bourgeoisie is the standard-bearer of revolution. This notion has its origin in the fact that, at a certain period of history, the bourgeoisie plays a revolutionary role; since it has been so in those countries, which to-day stand at the van of human progress, it is bound to be so in the rest of the world. A particular inter-relation of social forces rendered the bourgeoisie revolutionary in certain countries at a certain epoch of history. It would be a mechanical reading of history to assert that an identical juxtaposition of social forces will occur in every other country. In fact, here in India the social forces are somewhat differently related, and this difference has made itself felt upon the political thoughts and movement of the country.

Nor is India a solitary instance. Russia in broad outlines belonged to the same category. The revolutionary sig-

nificance of her bourgeoisie was not very considerable. It was left for the proletariat to carry through the bourgeois revolution—to lead the peasantry in the final struggle against the landed aristocracy. If it was so in Russia, it is likely to be more so in India, where the bourgeoisie is even more backward than their Russian confreres. The Indian bourgeoisie is even innocent of the radicalism which prevailed among the intellectual wing of the Russian bourgeoisie, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. All the reactionary cults, which find expression in Gandhism, are more hostile to revolutionary ideas than was the Pan-Slavism of the Russian intellectuals. The Indian bourgeoisie are closely bound up with landlordism, and the majority of the intellectuals are generally conservative in their social outlook.

This being the case, if we accept the action of the bourgeoisie as the only indicator of revolutionary perspectives in India, there rises before us a rather discouraging vision. It is notorious how the Gandhite leadership got frightened at the revolutionary sweep of the movement it pretended to lead. This fright, coupled with an innate anti-revolutionary conviction, induced the petty bourgeoisie to set their face against the great mass movement which threatened the security of the Empire. They systematically sabotaged the movement, and finally succeeded in throwing it into hopeless confusion.

The next stage was the passing of the leadership into the hands of the bourgeoisie. The new leaders condemned the vacillating tactics of the Gandhites and promised to take up a determined fight against the British Government. The struggle between Gandhism and the relatively conscious bourgeois politics was the outstanding feature of the movement for nearly a year. It ended in the rout of Gandhism in politics, and the capture of the nationalist movement by the faction which promised to be the pioneer of a well-organised political apparatus of the bourgeoisie. For all practical purposes, the Nationalist demands were not only divorced from the objective necessity of the masses, but even the grievances of the lower middle class were left out of their purview. The beginning of formulating a nationalist programme, exclusively in accordance with the interests of the bourgeoisie, was made. Such a beginning could not be made without discarding all tendencies towards revolutionary tactics. This is demanded by the actual position of the Indian bourgeoisie. Unwilling to adopt revolutionary tactics, the nationalist bourgeoisie fall back upon the slow process of undermining the position of Imperialism by stages. Their

policy is to secure concession after concession, till the entire power passes from the foreign government to the peoples' representatives. The Indian bourgeoisie as a class is wedded to this reformism and, therefore, hopes to accomplish a revolution within the four corners of a non-existent constitution.

This slow process of reformism, which at first sight looks very futile, possesses a deeper significance, owing to the fact that it is carried out upon a revolutionary background. Although the nationalist bourgeoisie fail to mobilize the revolutionary energy of the masses to back up their demands for reform, Imperialism is fully conscious of the existence of the powder magazine, capable at the slightest ignition of blowing it up. It also knows that the dynamic force of nationalism does not lie either in the reactionary doctrines of the lower middle class intellectuals, nor in the "national demand" of the bourgeoisie, but in the partially manifested will of the masses to revolt against their miserable condition. Imperialism is reluctantly inclined to make petty concessions to the reformist bourgeoisie (whose impotency it is fully aware of) to prevent the possible determination of the bourgeoisie to fall back upon these forces of revolution. The Indian bourgeoisie have repeatedly proved themselves so averse to revolution, that they would court it only as the last resort, if they do it at all even then. Thus, the minimum concession would keep them dissatisfied and annoying, but out of harm. The burnt cow dreads the fire. The British government cannot imagine a repetition of the days of 1920-21 without a shudder. They are prepared to bribe the nationalist bourgeoisie to avoid that. Owing to this circumstantial reason, even the timid reformism of the Indian bourgeoisie objectively produces a revolutionary effect. It cuts into the reserves of Imperialism.

In view of this essentially revolutionary character of the situation in India, every phase of the anti-imperialist struggle has its value in the general scheme of events. In the last year, the nationalist bourgeoisie have been busy in organising the fighting qualities of their class inside a powerful political party. As stated above, owing to deep-seated reasons, the programme and tactics of this party still remain essentially reformist. The party leaders do not fail to indulge in bombastic language and veiled threats which, however, are empty. The party is young, lacking the assets of a radical social outlook, constructive political ideology and a firm determination to act. It has not even succeeded in drawing all

the bourgeois elements together. Nevertheless, for the first time in the history of the Indian national movement, it has acted as the conscious spokesman of an entire class, and has, therefore, sounded the close of that epoch when Imperialism could play the one section of the bourgeoisie against the other. This is certainly a long step forward.

The new bourgeois party (Swaraj Party) began its life by rejecting what was called the negative policy of Gandhi. The programme of the latter was to boycott pseudo-parliaments granted by Imperialism to allay the post-war discontent of the bourgeoisie. The parliamentary boycott was to be supplemented by the boycott of law-courts, schools and British manufactures. In the first election held on 1920, the nationalists did not take part, they even persuaded a considerable section of the electorate to boycott the polls. The other three items of boycott, however, were not successful as was to be expected. By steadily refusing to countenance the mass revolt, which swept the country in 1919-21, the Non-co-operation movement headed by Gandhi gradually became politically bankrupt. The upper middle class raised the standard of revolt against the political programme of Gandhism, and began the agitation for a "positive programme," which soon assumed the form of "capturing the Councils" (legislative). The argument was to carry the fight into the enemy's camp; to render the administration of the government impossible by parliamentary obstruction. It sounded reasonable: but the weakness of the programme lay in the fact that the so-called parliaments were nominal and the government was not responsible to them in any sense. Nevertheless, the new party started on the task with enthusiasm.

In the beginning it had to fight the opposition of the petty bourgeoisie, which stuck to the original programme of boycott: but before long the opposition was overcome and the central scene of the nationalist movement was shifted from the National Congress to the Council Chambers. The Nationalists contested the elections in 1923, but failed to secure a majority, except in one province. In the National Assembly as well as in all the provincial Councils they, however, captured such a considerable number of seats that practically everywhere they held the balance. Their failure to secure the majority exposed the impracticability of their programme. The programme, in short, was to bring in what was called the National Demands. If the Government accepted them, the Nationalists would co-operate with Imperialism; but if the demands were rejected, then they would make

government impossible by parliamentary obstruction. Now, since nowhere but in one province they had the majority, there could not be any question of carrying on the obstructionist tactics successfully. The famous National Demands originally were, in short, immediate grant of self-government, which, of course, did not mean separation from the Empire. Nothing even nearly like it. The Reforms Act of 1919 promises another instalment of self-government after ten years. The demand was the immediate grant of this promised instalment. According to the promise, this future instalment was to consist of some more administrative reforms; there is no question of power involved. Even these "National Demands" could not be presented in their original form, because more moderate nationalist members would not subscribe to those demands, and without their vote the demands would be rejected. Under the exigencies of forming the nationalist bloc, the demands were watered down until nothing was left. Finally, a resolution recommending a round-table conference between the Government and the nationalists was moved and carried. The Government quietly forgot the resolution. About the same time, MacDonald shook his mailed fist across the ocean. He warned the Indian nationalists, who counted upon the goodwill of the Labour Government, that "no party in Britain would be terrorised by threats of force." There ended the initial stage of the new tactics of bourgeois nationalism. The Government did not reject the Nationalists' demand, if demand it could be called; but neither did it do anything to comply with the demand.

Then began the period of parliamentary obstruction, which naturally could not be very effective, because the Swarajists did not by themselves have a majority, and they could not always count upon the support of the moderate elements. Nevertheless, some rather exciting parliamentary skirmishes took place. Many resolutions were passed over the heads of the Government, none of which were, of course, acted upon, the so-called "parliament" having little control over the administrative apparatus. A sharp battle was fought over the annual budget, a considerable portion of which was rejected. But the government sat tight. The events reached a real parliamentary deadlock first in the Central Provinces, where the Swarajists got a majority. The Council refused to sanction the money for the government; the Governor dissolved the Parliament, assuming all authority in his person, as is provided for in the Reforms Act. Then followed Bengal, another province where the Swarajists have almost a majority.

The same issue was also raised there, and the same course was adopted. The constitution does not call for a new election after a dissolution; so that nationalists cannot take the issue before the electorate. Now they are at their wit's end; the government is also in an uncomfortable position, being forced to admit its autocratic character.

While things have been heading towards this little parliamentary crisis, cautious but definite steps were being taken by Imperialism, headed by the Labour Government, to reconnoitre the ground in order to estimate how much should be conceded to rescue the Government of India from this *impasse*. The first step was the appointment of a Committee to enquire into the administration of the reforms, with the object of finding out if there are any defects in them, and if there are, how they can be removed. Some nationalists of the moderate school sat on this committee. This cautious step, taken principally for temporising, however, unexpectedly led to ugly consequences. Those leaders of Moderate Nationalism, who five years ago accepted the Reforms with gratitude one after another, operated with the government all through the hectic days of Non-co-operation, appeared before the Committee one after the other, not to defend, but to denounce the present system of administration as defective and unworkable. With more or less vehemence, all demanded further measures of self-government.

The second step taken was tentative negotiation in London. Of course, no official commitment whatsoever was made. A delegation from the right wing and the centre visited London, ostensibly on its own initiative, but obviously at the desire of the Labour Government. Underground negotiations took place. Even a persistent rumour was set afloat that the leader of the Swarajists, Mr. C. R. Das, had been invited to London. The latter appeared to be well-disposed towards such an invitation. But nothing came of it. The delegation returned home and expressed satisfaction at the result of its trip. The nature of the result, however, still remains unknown. The Nationalists, meanwhile, have inflicted another parliamentary defeat upon the government of India. A project to reform the Public Services has been rejected by them, as totally inadequate to meet the demands of the people.

Thus the matters stand at the time of writing. How will this deadlock be broken? How far will the nationalist bourgeoisie go to make the inevitable compromise? The question

of their surrender does not arise, because they have taken an uncompromising position. On the other hand, how much is Imperialism prepared to concede? There is no doubt that the former will meet the latter more than half-way. What effect will that make upon the nationalist struggle as a whole? The following months will answer these questions. Meanwhile, we can measure up the situation, in the light of experience gathered, and the inter-relation of the forces involved in the struggle.

While a great deal of noise was being made over political questions of paltry importance, concessions of considerable value have been made in the economic field. One of the principal demands of the nationalist bourgeoisie has always been to protect the native industries by a tariff wall. After a continued resistance of two decades, Imperialism has given in on this very vital question. In sequence of the Industrial Commission of 1916-17, according to whose recommendation the economics of Imperialism were placed on a new footing (that of developing India industrially as against the former policy of obstructing) another commission was appointed in 1921 to explore the fiscal ground. The Fiscal Commission was composed of a number of very influential Indian industrialists, together with the representatives of British capital and government. After an exhaustive enquiry of a year, the Fiscal Commission reported in favour of Protection on principle. In accordance with its recommendation, a Tariff Board was appointed to select the industries which should be protected immediately. The selection fell upon the iron and steel industry. On behalf of the industry, Tata and Co. demanded a duty of 30 per cent. on manufactured iron and steel imported into the country. The demand was granted with but slight modification. The people will suffer from the high prices that will be caused by this protection to the principal national industry; nevertheless, when the Protection Bill came before the Legislative Assembly, the nationalists abandoned their obstructionist tactics, and voted with the Government. In fact, they complained that the protection was not extensive enough. The effect of this economic concession will be very far-reaching, and will reflect considerably upon the political field. The Indian Government has already expressed its intention of placing, as from the coming year, all its orders for railway material in India. This indicates a very rapid development of the iron and steel industry. British industry will suffer in consequence. But Imperialism is not committing suicide. The protection, which will injure British manufacturers, is not meant only for Indian

capital. There is another scheme involved in the whole new policy. British capital is being exported to India to build up the iron and steel industry there behind the tariff walls. Incidentally, the most powerful section of the Indian bourgeoisie controlling the steel industry, will be so closely linked up with British banks, that the backbone of bourgeois nationalism will be broken.

The next concession in the economic field is the contemplated removal of the impediment on India's premier industry—textile. Already during the war, this industry was granted protection which, however, could not be fully effective, owing to the excise duty levied upon the cotton manufactures. Now demand for the removal of this excise duty is being pushed vigorously. The demand is not very seriously opposed. It even finds response in the Anglo-Indian Press. Once this contemplated second step is taken, the acuteness of the conflict between the Indian bourgeoisie and Imperialism will temporarily subside. But the political leaders of the nationalist movement do not belong to the capitalist class. They are mostly intellectuals, and not a few hail from the lower middle class. A reconciliation between British and Indian capital will confirm the reformism of these leaders; but they will keep on pressing for political concessions, in addition to the economic ones. So, in order that the new policy of reconciliation may be worked smoothly, Imperialism will find it advisable to placate the intellectuals also. That means that on both the fronts, economic as well as political, it will be obliged to yield ground, however little it might be in the beginning.

By itself, this conflict is insoluble. Now, if the attempts of Imperialism to smooth it, can be counteracted by action on our part to accentuate the conflict, the state of war that obtains to-day will never end. On the contrary, it will grow acuter every day, and the anti-imperialist struggle will soon exceed the bounds of reformism, and be consciously heading towards revolution. It is obvious what should be the nature of our activities. While supporting the nationalist bourgeoisie in every act of resistance to Imperialism, we should mobilise the revolutionary mass energy which the nationalist bourgeoisie is afraid of touching. The rapid crystallisation of bourgeois nationalism around a reformist programme has left the field clear. For the first time in the history of the Indian national movement, there will come into existence a political party demanding separation from the Empire. Nationalist elements, which up till now followed the

bourgeoisie, will enter this party; because the programme of reformism advocated by the bourgeoisie neglects their interests altogether. To aid the organisation of this party of revolutionary nationalism, is our immediate task. The objective situation is quite ripe, although there are enormous subjective difficulties. The masses are very restive. The peasantry is a veritable inflammable material, while the city proletariat demonstrates its revolutionary zeal whenever there is an opportunity. The process of uniting all these revolutionary elements into an anti-imperialist army is going on steadily. The collapse of bourgeois nationalism, as expressed by the present Parliamentary deadlock will only accentuate this process. The people will see that the reformist programme of the bourgeoisie does not lead anywhere. The centre of gravity of the nationalist movement will be shifted back to its proper place, namely—mass action. As soon as the rank and file of the nationalist forces are freed from the reformist leadership of the bourgeoisie, they will begin to follow the standard of revolution, because in that case, they will be convinced that the anti-imperialist struggle cannot be conducted successfully in a different way. There is every indication that things are moving in that direction, and that the next stage of the Indian movement will be a great advance towards revolution.

M. N. ROY.

