

#### XIV. INDEPENDENCE OF INDIA LEAGUE OF BENGAL (CALCUTTA)

Dear Comrades,

Let me greet very heartily your efforts and determination to form a new party which breaking away from the "old policies and programmes" will fight for "full, all round freedom" of the nation. The appearance of such a party is long overdue although spasmodic efforts for its organisation have been made from various direction during the last years. While enthusiastically offering my comradely services and complete cooperation for the historic task you have undertaken, I must avail myself of your invitation for criticism of the manifesto and programme published by you. Let it be emphasised that the following critical remarks will be made in comradely spirit and only with the object of assisting the growth of a national revolutionary party. My observations will not be confined to the manifesto and programme issued by you. They will touch the whole problem of organisation of the party throughout the country.

You are perfectly correct to begin your manifesto with a critical review of the past. But the criticism should be more searching. If the defects of the movement in the past are not clearly seen, the future will not be entirely free from them. The analysis of the past will make it evident that even in its best days the movement floundered for the absence of a clear programme. Therefore what is needed now is not a new programme; but to present before the country, for the first time clearly formulated programme of national revolution, free from metaphysical ambiguities, untempered by constitutional prejudices and unfettered by reactionary social conceptions.

What is the programme of a movement? A simple statement of its goal is not the programme. Nor is it the formulation of a series of demands. The programme of a movement must be the statement of its object as well as of the reasons for the attainment of that object. Then it should be explained how the mission of realising the object has been bestowed by history on the social elements involved in the movement, and particularly on the political party constituting the conscious vanguard of those social elements. Further, the appropriate means for the realisation of the goal should be defined without ambiguity. Lastly, immediate economic and political demands corresponding to the requirements of the constituents of the movement should be put forward for developing the movement.

The pre-requisite for the formulation of a clear programme for any movement is the understanding of the social composition of the movement. Every political movement is essentially the expression of a deeper social fomentation. Only from this point of view is it possible to comprehend why certain section of the Indian people are out and out loyalists, some will be satisfied with gradual reform under British protection, others will be happy in the heaven of "equal partnership" within the British empire and the remainder must have "full, all round freedom". The reason for these variations of political outlook is not the temperament of the various sections of the population, as is often said and believed. The diverse political outlooks are determined by divergent interests of the respective social ele-

ments. Therefore, in order to have a clear and appropriate programme, the Independence League, that is the party standing for an all-round national revolution, should, in the first place, be clear about its social composition. It must be ascertained which sections of the Indian people can never and in the least be accommodated inside the British empire, and, therefore, must fight for its complete and unconditional overthrow. To start a political party on the basis of age is a false start. If the Independence League will be what it should—what is needed in the present situation of the country, namely a national revolutionary party—its appeal should be directed not to the “youths” (as is usually the case now), but to certain social elements irrespective of age. Age is a shifting thing. A youth is not always a youth. Therefore to build a political party with the youth as the foundation is to build on shifting sand. There must be solid foundation if the structure is to stand.

Looking back into the past we find that this was precisely the defect of the “new spirit” of 1905. It was only an effervescence of youth which did not seek a social foundation to build upon. Therefore it ended but in “adventure, emotion and enthusiasm”, which all were of no avail because “those who were borne down for ages under the weight of economic serfdom and of the social inequalities and inequalities were not thrilled when the clarion-call of political freedom “reached their ears”. Indeed, in those days of “emotion and enthusiasm”, the clarion-call was exclusively for the youth; it totally ignored the existence of “those borne down for ages”. Should the effort of today not again end in glorious but futile “adventure”, the mistake of the past must be frankly admitted. The Independence League must consciously represent not the effervescence of youth, but the interests of the oppressed, exploited and expropriated majority of the nation. Then its programme will not be burdened with meaningless verbiage, utopian demands, impractical proposition and reprehensible ambiguity about the means and methods of struggle.

In your manifesto the non-cooperation movement is correctly estimated; but it is not fully subjected to the searchlight of revolutionary criticism. Lessons must be derived

from the rich but bitter experience of 1920-22 for the benefit of the future of the nationalist movement. The 1921 period of the movement was distinct from the 1905 period in that then the movement found a tremendous access of dynamic strength in consequence of a deep social fermentation, which had not been the case fifteen years ago. The movement collapsed because its programme did not reflect that social fermentation. Instead of developing that fermentation into a veritable revolution, the leaders of the movement discouraged it. Antagonism of class interests created a wide gulf between the rank and file, on the one side, and the leadership, on the other. This gulf could not be bridged with all the reactionary formulas of Gandhism. Finally it swallowed the movement. The new movement should differ from Non-cooperation not "in details" as Jawaharlal Nehru maintained in his speech at the Delhi Provincial Conference, but essentially, in the social homogeneity of its composition, character of its leadership, clarity of its programme, firmness of its demands and courageousness of its action. The "possibilities of non-cooperation are limited", because they are only negative. Owing to the task of sufficient appreciation of the gravity of the task undertaken, the limitedness of a purely negative action is not understood even by those who take the initiative in striking out a new course for the movement. For example, speaking to the Delhi Provincial Conference at Meerut Jawaharlal Nehru declared that "with organised masses tremendous pressure can be brought and any Government will give in". This is a grievous error for a leader of a revolutionary movement to fall into. In support of his theses, the speaker asserted that "in Europe the main methods of developing sanctions and of seizing power are based not on violence, but peaceful organisation of workers, peasants and others". This is the most distorted view of the European situation that one could give. The Social Democratic parties in Europe, which propose to capture power by peaceful means have today become instruments of the capitalist and imperialist state.

**The British Labour Party is the most glaring example. It is an illusion to think that the state equipped with**

formidable means of offence and defence will give in under the pressure of peacefully organised workers, peasants and others. It will stubbornly resist the pressure, as has been the case in a series of countries during the last years, and the pressure will be of no avail, unless it develops into an attack upon the state. We could learn something from the British general strike of 1926. The pressure of the organised workers upon the capitalist state collapsed as soon as it hesitated to be developed into an open attack upon the state. If we begin with the admission that the existing states are too strong to be overthrown, then, why take up the fight? Take it lying down. Then, be prepared to accept gratefully what imperialism will be pleased to grant, and glorify that as "equal partnership" or even "independence". If the Independence League is born with the ideology propounded by one of its founders at Meerut, then comrades, it will not go further than the non-cooperation movement, it will not meet a more dignified end.

You are perfectly correct in stating in your manifesto that the masses will rally under the banner of national independence when national independence promises to introduce change in their present economic and social conditions. But if you propose to form the Independence League as a band of "self-sacrificing adventurous, emotional and enthusiastic" youths taking upon their devoted shoulders the noble mission of arousing the masses from "ignorance and inertia", then, the new party will not have the much-needed social homogeneity of composition, and a gulf will still divide its constituents from the leadership. These two grave defects of the non-cooperation movement should be eliminated, if the new party would lead the national revolution. The youthful intellectuals from the oppressed, exploited and expropriated lower middle class should know that their interests are identical with those of the workers and peasants. They should appeal to them not as benevolent saviours, but as comrades fighting for a common interests—one should not put the cart before the horse. The revolutionisation of the nationalist movement which process is evidenced by the efforts to break away politically, ideologically and organisationally from past traditions of

the movement, has been caused by a growing restiveness of the masses. These are no longer in a state of inertia. As long as they were in that state, the nationalist movement was a movement for reforms and concessions. The present demand for a new course is the voice of the masses. The new party will be the conscious vanguard of the majority of the nation, if it is born as the organised expression of the revolutionary discontent of the masses. As the vanguard leader, the party's task is to develop this discontent, to organise it into concrete actions preparatory to the final revolutionary upheaval. But it must be known that the party comes into existence to meet the needs of the situation—not to create the needs. The party should not pretend to have been born ahead of its generating force. It cannot uplift the masses, it should be the organ of the masses.

With this clear conception of this genesis will the party be able to formulate its programme correctly. As it is, the programme is not what it should be. While detailing what are arbitrarily termed "Economic Democracy" and "Social Democracy" the main question of "Political Democracy" is left entirely undefined. The masses are not told how the perfunctory, ill-defined and utopian demands chronicled under the former two heads are connected with political democracy. The weakness of the programme, which is given an apparently radical complexion by the inclusion of such terms as "Social Democracy", "Nationalisation" etc., was soon exposed in a very ironical manner. In addressing a gathering of students at Allahabad at the beginning of October, Motilal Nehru referred to your manifesto as not materially different from the report of his committee. He tauntingly remarked that he was prepared to accept entirely your programme of "Economic and Social Democracy" if the term "Complete political independence" were replaced by "Dominion Status". This remark should give you food for thought. There must be something amiss with your programme, otherwise it could not be acceptable precisely to him whose policy it purports to oppose. Your demands under the heading of "Economic and Social Democracy" cannot be so radical, their realisation cannot be so beneficial for the masses as you mistakenly believe.

They could not be so, if it were possible to realise them under dominion status. In other words, those demands do not attack the foundation of imperialism. You placed yourselves in such a false position by not dealing with the burning question of national freedom—by leaving it entirely untouched.

Those measures of "Economic and Social Democracy" which can be realised within the framework of imperialist domination may be somewhat camouflaged will not satisfy the vital demands of the oppressed and exploited majority. Don't forget the real thing for the glamour of the deceptive toy of "Social Democracy". Economic and social freedom of the masses will be attained only under socialism, but in the present Indian situation socialism is a far cry. Overthrow of foreign domination is the task, the accomplishment of which will open up the way to socialism those who want to go that far. The working class, whose historic mission it is to establish socialism must at this moment struggle for national freedom as a step towards the final goal.

National independence should be made the central point of the programme of the new party; and this is not done just by writing it in bold letters. The question should be clearly put in contrast and stated. By begging the question one will inevitably land in dominion status by the back door, as Jawaharlal Nehru has done. In his speech at the Delhi conference had been secured.

Those elements of the Indian population, which bear the burnt of imperialist domination, must have completed independence. They are the productive classes. Imperialist booty represents so much taken away from those sections of the Indian people who produce value by their labour. The complaint of other classes against foreign rule is that they do not get what they would have got in the absence of the foreign overlord. The basis of dominion status is some understanding between imperialism and the upper strata of the Indian people as regards the distribution of what is taken away from the producing classes. Imperialism will never make this argument by foregoing a portion of what it derives from India today. It will concede to the Indian

upper classes a share in the booty by increasing it, that is by intensifying the exploitation of the producing classes. This is what dominion status will essentially mean for the majority of the population. Therefore those sections of the population, which by their toil produce value considerable portion of which goes out of the country as imperialist booty, are the uncompromising enemies of imperialist domination. The lower middle class, whose political and economic condition will hardly improve in any regime of make-believe self-government based upon a compromise between imperialism and the upper strata of the Indian population, must also fight for the complete and unconditional termination of imperialist domination. Under the shadow of imperialist domination any formal democratic right granted to the Indian people will be of no material value. If democracy come to its own in India, if the people of India becomes the sovereign power in the country, there cannot be any room for a foreign agency exercising control over her economic and political life even in the most indirect way; therefore dominion status will not introduce democracy in India. In it the upper strata of the population may be raised to "equal partnership" with the British overlord, but the majority of the population—workers, peasants, lower middle class—will remain oppressed. "Indianisation" of the public services, a tempting plum held out to the lower middle class intellectuals in order to secure their trusting adhesion to the bourgeois leaders will satisfy but very few when it will actually be sent around to the hungry multitudes. So, not only the workers and peasants but the lower middle class are pitted against imperialism which they must fight and destroy not for any sentimental reason, but pushed on by the iron law of struggle for existence. They are against dominion status, not because it is beneath the dignity of Indian people to accept a gift from the foreign ruler, but because it will subject them to greater exploitation while not giving them any material political right.

By this appreciation of the relation between India and Britain, and among the various sections of the Indian population should the programme of the Independence League be determined. By putting forward apparently radical but

conceived demands, by using high-sounding terms having no immediate bearing with the crux of the present situation, the League weakens the very reason of its being. The vital question of political power should be placed in the centre of your programme. It must be stated clearly that in order to reconstruct itself politically, economically, culturally in order to catch up the progress that was obstructed by several centuries of foreign rule, the Indian nation must have access to sovereign political power. An independent democratic state is the precondition for any change or improvement of existing economic conditions and social relations. As explained above, this change will not take place under dominion status, except for the worse. Ask the supporters of the Nehru scheme, will "dominionised" India stop paying Britain *two hundred crores of rupees a year* as profit for capital invested by the latter in India? If not, who will continue meeting this huge bill? This fabulous amount is found by depriving the Indian producing masses of a portion of their extremely reduced means of subsistence. Now the Indian workers, peasants and others, who live essentially by their toil, pay approximately six rupees a year for the benefit of the British rule, presently the quota will be increased at least 50 per cent to pay for the "equal partnership" of the Indian upper classes in the British empire. *Repudiation of India's "Indebtedness" to Britain; confiscation of British capital invested in India*, these are the elementary conditions for the real independence of the Indian people. Can these conditions be created either by a compromise on the basis of dominion status or by "peaceful pressure of the organised workers, peasants and others" as suggested by one of the founders of the Independence League—Jawaharlal Nehru? Obviously, not. Capture of the state power by the Indian people is the only way to the creation of these conditions. The imperialist state must be overthrown, and a national democratic state must be established under the control of those, who today foot the backbreaking bill of British imperialism—these, comrades, are the implications of the slogan of "Complete Independence" with which you propose to organise a new party.

Once the party has a clear vision of its goal and knows clearly why this goal must be reached, the means for the realisation of the object—the methods of fight for freedom—should be determined. The object, of course, predetermines the methods of fight. Reform can be realised through constitutional means. It is otherwise with revolution. The object of your party being *National Revolution*, you must employ revolutionary methods of fight, unless you want to betray yourselves. Then, as the party can attain its object only by mobilising the energy of its social constituents, the methods it proposes to employ in the fight should be incorporated in the programme. A revolutionary party is not a conspiracy. It operates with the masses of people. Its methods of fight, plans of action, cannot, therefore, be shrouded in mystery.

There must be a programme of action for the realisation of the object. It is not enough to declare that we want independence as against dominion status. A mere expression of wish or view has no practical political value. Still, the resolution of the Lucknow conference which proclaimed the inauguration of the "Independence for India League", is but an expression of opinion. Your manifesto is as improvement upon that resolution. But even that does not contain a concrete programme of action. According to the Lucknow resolution, the League will be a mere propaganda body. This resolution can only be the result of the belief that there are but a few in India who want national independence; and that these few must carry this gospel of freedom to the "inert and ignorant masses." I have shown above that this is a mistaken belief. The necessity for national independence, and the desire for it are there. The task of the new party is not only to give expression to this desire; but also to set those having the necessity and the desire into action.

For this the party must have a programme of action.

While having no illusion as regards the final culmination of the struggle for the realisation of its object, namely, the overthrow of the imperialist state root and branch, the party can set the masses in political action without com-

mitting futile violence. Everybody including those in favour of dominion status, dispute the selfarrogated right of the British parliament to settle India's political fate, and demand that the constitution of India should be worked out by the Indian people. On recommendation of the Simon commission, British imperialism will grant India constitutional reforms which it will consider suitable to her stomach. A section of the Indian people as represented by the All-parties Conference, has already produced a constitution which they think is good for India. There are other proposals and suggestions of minor importance. But none of them has been submitted to the verdict of the entire Indian people. Your party can and should intervene in the situation effectively by demanding the convocation of a *constituent assembly*, elected by universal suffrage, to settle the political future of the country. Irrespective of the attitude of the imperialists, their Indian allies and the protagonists of dominion status, your party should carry on a vigorous agitation to mobilise the people on the slogan of constituent assembly. At the same time the programme of national revolution and the establishment of the national democratic state should be worked out to be placed before the constituent assembly. Incorporating the demands and representing the interests of the majority of the population these documents will secure the support of the majority. The struggle will have entered higher stage requiring other tactics when the election of the constituent assembly becomes an actual issue. Meanwhile the very demand and the mobilisation of the majority of the people in support of it will represent an actual challenge to the authority of the imperialist state.

After these observations on the subject as a whole my criticism of the various details under the heads "Economic Democracy" and "Social Democracy" in your programme will appear more pertinent. Plans for changes in the existing economic conditions of the country should be stated in the programme of national revolution. If after the overthrow of the foreign rule the country will continue in the *status quo ante*, the national democratic state will not be the organ of national revolution. Then, immediate econo-

mic demands of the oppressed majority should be incorporated in the programme of action of the party. These two things, the end and the means—are confused in your programme. Further, some of the demands are ill-conceived, misleading and do not represent the interest of the masses. For example, the realisation of all the demands under the heading “Economic Democracy” will not eliminate the exploitation of man by man; thus there will be no economic democracy. The items under the heading “Social Democracy” have nothing to do with socialism (and social democracy must mean socialism if you mean anything by it), they are measures of superficial social reform, and some of them are utopian at that. Democracy cannot be put into water-tight compartments labeled “Political”, “Economic” and “Social”. It is an indivisible whole characterised by certain political and economic features.

Now let us examine the measures proposed in your programme as measures of economic democracy. As pointed out above economic democracy can be realised only after the social system of private ownership, which leads to exploitation of one member of the society by the other, is abolished. This is also social democracy. There are not two things as “Economic Democracy” and “Social Democracy”.

They are one and the same thing. One cannot be realised without the other. Now, you demand “Equitable distribution of wealth”. What does it mean? Who is going to decide what is equitable? Obviously you do not mean equal distribution, because your programme provides against that. You do not propose abolition of capitalism. The rights you demand for labour will not in the least restrict the operation of capitalism. On the contrary, you expressly desire to “make strikes and lock-outs unnecessary”. You propose to abolish the expression of class-struggle without abolishing classes. The most indulging critic will condemn these demands as utopian.

“Economic Democracy” proposed in your programme as regards land is much worse. You leave the vital question of landownership alone, suggesting “uniform system of land tenure”. This is very vague, What will be this system?

Your advocacy of "the abolition of landlordism" defeats the object you presumably, have in view. Your proposal is to buy out the landlords. Where is the money to be found? The state can raise the money only by taxation—that is by making the masses pay to the landlords who have sucked their blood for ages. The landlords may be paid in bonds issued by the government. In that case the landlords will continue as a parasitic on the economic life of the nation only in a different form, free from all worries, interests on their bonds guaranteed by the state. Your proposal for the "annulment of agricultural indebtedness", a measure sorely needed by the peasants, is equally unavailing.

I am constrained to say, comrades, that concrete demands and propositions in your programme mock at the apparently radical headings "Economic Democracy" and "Social Democracy". It is precisely for these reasons that men like Motilal Nehru, who would not agree with you on the vital question of national independence, are prepared to support your economic and social demands. Therefore my recommendation is that you should consider the matter more carefully paying more attention to the contents than to the headlines of the programme.

The party you have undertaken to organise is not a socialist party. It need not be a socialist party. Therefore, it should not pretend to be one. The working class, which must eventually establish socialism, will join hands with the lower middle class in the fight for *democratic freedom* guaranteeing them certain political and economic rights, and objectively representing an advance towards socialism. Your party must have a *programme of national revolution*, not of pseudo-socialism. Indian people must be free from foreign domination, because it has, for centuries, obstructed the normal economic and the political progress of the country. National revolution means not only the overthrow of foreign rule, but also the destruction of antiquated economic systems and social institutions which have been galvanised by imperialism as support to itself. Even today imperialism is planning to mobilise the native states into an active instrument against national revolution. Destruc-

tion of feudal landownership—parasitic, not productive, ownership of large landed-estates, is a condition for the establishment of democracy. Therefore next to the overthrow of imperialism, root and branch, liquidation of feudalism as embodied in the native states and landlordism is the fundamental task of national revolution. The party desiring to lead the national revolution should, therefore, not go around this task and be a revolutionary party.

Summarising: the cardinal points in the programme of the party you propose to organise should be: (1) The capture of the state-power by the people; (2) establishment of a democratic state under the effective control of the majority of the people; (3) confiscation of British capital invested in India; (4) repudiation of India's "Indebtedness" to Britain; (5) abolition of the native states and landlordism; (6) nationalisation of public utilities and key industries.

In addition to these basic points the programme should include measures corresponding to the immediate demands of the workers and peasants in order to guarantee that the national state will be really democratic, and to make national independence of practical value to the masses. The following are the main of these measures:

A. For all 1. Universal suffrage; 2. centralised democratic state guaranteeing protection for minorities; 3. complete freedom of press and platform and association; 4. freedom of religion and worship; 5. free and compulsory primary education; 6. right to carry arms; 7. equal political rights for women; 8. abolition of indirect taxation; 9. taxation of large and unearned income.

B. For the workers 1. minimum wage raising the present standard of living; 2. legislation guaranteeing an irreducible standard of the conditions of labour; 3. eight-hour day; 4. insurance against unemployment, sickness, old age, maternity, etc., at the expense of the employer; 5. a month's holiday with full wages in a year; 6. legislation of the economic and political organisation of the workers, and of the right of strike; 7. establishment of workers' committees in the factories to guard workers' interests; 8. workers' control of nationalised industries.

C. For the peasants 1. Abolition of all other charges

except the land tax payable to the state not exceeding 15 per cent of the net income; 2. freedom of taxation for peasants living upon "uneconomic holdings"; 3. liquidation of agricultural indebtedness *without indemnification*. 4. control of usury-rate of interests not to exceed 5 per cent annum; 5. cheap agricultural credit; 6. transfer of the co-operative credit societies to the control of peasants' organisations; 7. state aid for the mechanisation of the cultivation of land.

Finally, comrades, I believe that the critical observations of mine will receive in the comradely spirit they are made

Yours fraternally,

Undated and unsigned draft resolution by M. N. Roy.

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