

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA

By VALIA.

THE open letter of the Communist Parties of China, Great Britain and Germany to the Indian Communists (see Comm. Int. No. 10, 1932) declared that the Communist movement in India is lagging seriously behind the general development of the working class.

The Indian proletariat is a young proletariat. There are comparatively few workers of the second generation. The greater part of the workers have come in from the villages, and are closely connected with them. They do not possess habits of organisation, and preserve the numerous traditions of the backward villages. Caste relics and unbelievable poverty, the utter dejection and oppression of the masses of the workers, combined with differences of language and religion, and also various other feudal relics in the social system of India—all this together has hindered the rallying, and the growth of the class-consciousness of the proletariat, and assisted the exploiting classes to preserve their leading influence. However, the exceptional weight of imperialist oppression and landlord-usurer servitude has led to the Indian workers being drawn comparatively early into the political struggle, into the liberation movement.

As early as 1908, under the influence of the first big wave of the independence movement, the workers of Bombay organised a political demonstration and protest strike against the arrest of Tilak. Regarding this demonstration of the Bombay proletariat, Lenin wrote:

“In India also the proletariat has already reached the point of a conscious political struggle, and as this is the case, the days of the Anglo-Czarist order in India are numbered.”

Thus, at the dawn of the Indian workers' movement, when trade unions and political organisations of the proletariat did not yet exist, the advanced workers of India had *already* shown their will to struggle for the independence of the

country, in practice, displaying a comparatively high level of political consciousness.

The next ten years did not produce any clear examples of the political growth of the proletariat. The events of 1919-22, however, showed that the Indian proletariat had advanced very far. This was proven not only by the unprecedented growth of the strike movement* in India and the formation of the first trade unions, but also in the active participation of the working masses (and not in Bombay alone) in political demonstrations, meetings, street conflicts and fights with the police. This is described clearly enough by Gandhi, who, even at that time, was the political leader of the Indian bourgeoisie.

In the article “The Worker's Mite” (see “Young India,” page 736 for 1921), characterising the political activity of the workers, Gandhi stated:—

“The public have no idea of the rôle played by the workers in the collection of the Tilak Swaraj fund; 21,000 workers of Ahmedabad paid 54,000 rupees, which according to present wages, is one-tenth of a month's pay; 7,000 workers joined as members. In the same way the Bombay workers sent their coppers without being appealed to. These are striking times.”

The awakening of the workers did not at all please the Indian bourgeoisie, and from 1921 to 1932 they have tried in every way to disorganise the struggle of the proletariat.

“The political circumstances are also beginning to have their effect on the workers of India. It would be a *most serious* mistake to use strikes of the workers for political purposes. I do not deny that strikes may serve political ends. But they do not fit in with the plan of *non-co-opera-*

* In 1921, the number of workers who went on strike was 600,351, with 6,984,426 working days lost. In 1922, there were 435,434 strikers, who lost 3,927,727 working days.

tion without violence. It is most dangerous to use strikes of workers for political purposes until the workers are ready to work for the common good." (Ibid. page 737.)

Gandhi well understood the danger of a wide development of the revolutionary movement of the working masses, and together with the bourgeoisie as a whole, sharply opposed the street demonstrations of the Bombay workers during the visit of the Prince of Wales (1919).

"At this time, in another part of the town, the workers were in a state of *criminal insubordination* . . . enormous crowds . . . held up the trams, knocked the hats off all foreigners and pelted the Europeans with stones. Encouraged by their first successes, the crowd began to burn tramcars and automobiles. There were several such crowds of at least 20,000." (Ibid. page 1156.)

These facts and also the estimate of them given by the leader of the Indian bourgeoisie confirm the fact of the political growth of the working class (in which the influence of the October Revolution was greatly felt), and its exceptional activity in the independence movement of 1919-1922.

The events of 1928-30 again showed a further gigantic development of the Indian proletariat. The influence of successful Socialist construction in the U.S.S.R., the Chinese revolution, the deepening crisis of capitalism and the growing rise of the Communist movement, and also the experience of the class struggle in India which demonstrated the position of the various classes—all this together tremendously advanced the growth of class-consciousness and the organisation of the Indian proletariat.

In 1928-30 the workers took an active part in the boycott of the Simon and Wheatley Commissions. The Bombay demonstration of 20,000 workers on February 3, 1928, on the day of arrival of Simon, was the first separate workers' demonstration with its workers' banners and under revolutionary leadership, and marked a new page in the life and development of the Indian proletariat. A wave of strikes, political strikes, demonstrations, swept the country. The working class emerged as the most active mass force in the struggle against imperialism—a struggle which had a revolutionary effect on the peasants and the urban petty bourgeoisie.

In 1930 the working masses all over the country took an active part in the independence movement.

Thus the whole history of the workers' movement for the last twenty-four years shows that the proletariat (especially in the last few years) has actively participated in the struggle for the

independence of India. The proletariat have acted decisively against national slavery and for the liberty of the country. The political activity of the working class has taken the line of the anti-imperialist struggle. This arose from the whole of the circumstances in the country. In this should be sought the explanation of the chief causes of the tremendous influence of the bourgeoisie on the workers. The Indian bourgeoisie, using the hatred of the workers for the imperialists (and being themselves in the liberal "opposition" and "fighting" for reforms), came to the workers with the preaching of the common national front, depicting the Congress as an organisation of the whole people and carefully concealing its bourgeois class nature. In this faith in the National Congress and the illusions regarding the general national front is rooted the fact that many workers who come out into the streets with the slogans, "Down with the imperialists! Long live the revolution! Long live the workers' and peasants' government!" simultaneously support the National Congress, considering that it leads the struggle against the imperialists and represents the interests of the whole people.

The sharpening of the class struggle and the growth of the class-consciousness of the proletariat led, at last, in 1930, to the proletarian vanguard breaking with the "left" national reformists, and the formation of the Communist Party (in the form of separate groups). This formation of the Communist movement, which signified the transition of the proletariat to a *conscious* struggle for proletarian hegemony in the national movement, took place under the influence of the international Communist proletariat. It at once made itself felt in a great sharpening of the struggle of the proletarian vanguard against the leadership of the National Congress, and its agents in the working class movement. The bourgeoisie developed a frenzied attack. In the letter of Nehru to the Bombay workers' and peasants' party in spring, 1930, the bourgeoisie demanded that the advanced workers should submit to the leadership of the National Congress. In reply to the determined resistance of the revolutionary workers (see "Workers' Weekly," February, 1930), who were acting for the independence of the proletariat and a revolutionary programme of struggle, the bourgeois National Congress began an attack on the workers' organisations.

Utilising the support of Roy, Kandalkar and Co., the National Congress conducted a "workers' week," split the Girni Kamgar (the revolutionary trade union of the textile workers, "Red Flag,") etc. All the facts show that the

National Congress and its agents carried on their disorganizational work, hiding behind anti-imperialist phraseology, coming forward in "opposition" to British imperialism. When the experience of the class struggle and the treachery of the National Congress to the independence movement (1930-31) showed the reformist, anti-revolutionary nature of the policy of the National Congress, its bourgeois essence, the working masses began to leave it. In this period the anti-imperialist character of the struggle of the working class began to become a factor which more and more hastened the liberation of the proletariat from the influence of the bourgeoisie, and its conversion from an active force of the independence movement into a leading force, the hegemon of the revolutionary people. Therefore a correct policy of Communists in the sphere of the anti-imperialist movement was, and still is, of the utmost importance.

In order to assist the Indian proletariat to become an independent class force, knowing its special interests and capable of leading the working masses, it is necessary to show (not only in words, in agitation, etc., but in the class struggle, in slogans, in correct forms of movement, etc.), that the National Congress is the class organisation of the bourgeoisie, *betraying* the struggle for independence, that in order to liberate the country from national slavery, it is necessary to create a Communist Party, it is necessary to rally the forces of the working class, the peasants, the revolutionary intelligentsia and the city poor, and, isolating the national reformists, to take the path of revolutionary methods of struggle, under the slogans of the Communist Party, following the example of the Soviet Union and China.

And this can *only* be carried out by taking a most energetic part in the independence movement, marching in the vanguard, attracting the whole of the working masses by our (proletarian) example, strengthening the common front of the proletariat and of all revolutionary democratic elements of the country, and first of all the working peasants.

In 1931 the workers began to leave the National Congress in comparatively large numbers (the strike at Sholapur, the Bombay demonstration on the day of Gandhi's departure, the numerous resolutions against the Round Table Conference, etc.). However, this process of the development of the workers' movement is taking place irregularly. While the advanced strata are leaving the National Congress, the backward sections of the proletariat, and the backward districts who are coming into the revolutionary struggle for the first time, are supporting the campaigns of the National Congress. In Bombay, the National

reformists, even now, succeed in calling meetings of tens of thousands of workers to protest against the sending of commissions to the Round Table Conference.

This is shown still more clearly in the backward districts. The liberal newspaper, "Leader," on January 8th, 1932, states that the workers of the railway workshops of Perambura (Southern India) demanded from the management that they should be allowed to leave work at two o'clock as a mark of respect to the arrested leaders of the Congress. In reply to the refusal of the management, the workers left work themselves and carried on a "quiet" strike, after which the reformist leaders, headed by Gari, held a prayer meeting of the workers in the evening, praying for the liberation of the national leaders of the Congress.

The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that to become the real leader of the working masses and to lead the revolutionary people to the revolution, isolating the national reformists, the Communist Party must carry on a correct policy in the independence movement, which consists not only of energetically fighting for independence, but also of the ability to attract and use all allies, who are ready, even for a short time, even to a certain limit, to fight really against the imperialists, to carry on a revolutionary struggle against them. The C.P.I., by leading the masses and actively participating in the struggle for independence, can make itself into the leader of the Indian revolution, with which the struggle against feudal relics is indissolubly connected, and for the liberation of the peasants.

THE TASKS OF THE COMMUNISTS IN THE ORGANISATION AND LEADERSHIP OF THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST STRUGGLE.

The revolutionary groups, which came out in defence of Communism and who considered themselves Communists, in reality remained part of the National Congress to the end of 1929. The process of development and the desertion of the National Congress by the revolutionary groups went on at an increased rate in 1928 and 1929. However, the final separation only came in 1930. The revolutionary groups energetically participated in the independence movement, and had great influence, but by their policy, they, in reality, almost amalgamated with the "left" national reformists, and did not appear before the working masses as an independent class force. As the result, there was no Communist Party.

The renegades, Roy and Co., agreeing to the policy of the Comintern in words, in reality hindered the formation of the Communist Party and called on the working class to submit to "left" national reformism. Hence the desperate agita-

tion of Roy for the formation of a national revolutionary (!) party and the replacement of the Communist Party by it. With this was connected his policy of abandoning criticism of "left" national reformism and the conversion of the working class into an appendage of the bourgeoisie. Roy was expelled from the ranks of the Comintern as a traitor, and an enemy of the international and Indian proletariat. Roy sabotaged the carrying out of the basic tasks, which were insistently shown by Comrade Stalin in 1925:—

"(1) The winning of the best elements of the working class to the side of Communism and the formation of *independent* Communist Parties; (2) the formation of a national revolutionary bloc of workers and peasants and the revolutionary intelligentsia against the bloc of the conciliatory national bourgeoisie and imperialism; (3) the securing of the hegemony of the proletariat in this bloc; (4) a struggle for the liberation of the town and village petty bourgeoisie from under the influence of the conciliatory national bourgeoisie."

Thus the period up to the end of 1929 was noteworthy for the fact (and after the expulsion of Roy, the remains of his ideology were not entirely eliminated), that the revolutionary groups who, in reality, had fused themselves with the "left" national-reformists, did not criticise him, thus hindering the liberation of the proletariat, from the influence of the bourgeoisie, and its conversion into an independent class force.

As we have already mentioned, a change began in 1930. The Communist groups took definite form. A break was made with "left" national-reformism. A severe struggle commenced. However, in carrying out this necessary change, the Communists made serious mistakes. While correctly sharpening the struggle and exposing the class essence and the conciliatory manoeuvres of the "left" national-reformists and advocating an independent workers' movement and the formation of a Communist Party, the Communist groups drifted away from the anti-imperialist movement, mistakenly identifying bourgeois national-reformism and the leadership of the National Congress (including the "lefts") with the sections of the workers, peasants and revolutionary intellectuals who were following the National Congress in their desire to fight against imperialism, and who could not see on the legal arena any other organisation which was fighting against imperialism.

The Communist groups made a mistake by putting the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie into the same category. The self-isolation of the Communists from the mass anti-imperialist movement, which outwardly was under the leadership

of the National Congress, was *mistaken to the core*. It led to a weakening of the contacts of the Communists with the working masses, and objectively assisted in strengthening the influence of the bourgeoisie among the toiling masses.

The open letter of the Communist Parties of China, Great Britain and Germany to the Indian Communists deals with this mistake in detail.

The correct position of the Communist Party in the sphere of the anti-imperialist movement is a part of the working-class approach of Communists to the political struggle of the working class. The Communists must seize on every democratic movement, participating in and standing at the head of it, must increase the class-consciousness of the workers, organising the ranks of the toiling masses, and leading them to higher and higher revolutionary aims, and to more revolutionary forms of struggle. In India the Communist Party is being formed and constructed for the first time. For the first time the young Communists (even though still in a propagandist form) are beginning to defend the Communist platform in the most difficult conditions and in reality to oppose themselves to the national bourgeoisie ("Workers' Week" in Bombay). But all the more sharply must we bring to light all the weaknesses of the Communist movement, so as to rapidly form a powerful Communist Party, and ensure the victorious development of the Indian anti-imperialist and agrarian revolution.

The platform of action of the C.P. India correctly pointed out that "the rule of British imperialism is the *basis* of the backwardness, the poverty, and the immeasurable sufferings of our people." British imperialism supports the landlord-usurer system of servitude. It has no moral basis and is generally hated by the oppressed and exploited masses of India. And he is not a Communist who cannot understand the most elementary task—to support with all his force, to move forward and fight for independence and the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle of the working masses, which is beginning, in some places, to link up with the agrarian movement. He is not a Communist who forgets in practice that Communists support every democratic movement, that "we are therefore obliged to set forth *to the whole people* and emphasise the general democratic tasks, not concealing our socialist convictions for a moment. He is not a Communist who forgets in practice his duty to be *ahead* of all in raising, sharpening and solving *every* general democratic question. . . . We must undertake the task of organising an all-round political struggle under the leadership of *our* Party so as to help this struggle to the extent of *our* powers, and the Party could do this, and in reality shows

every oppositional strata that it is doing it" (Lenin).

The Indian Communists must realise this elementary truth and eliminate the under-estimation, which exists among them, regarding the anti-imperialist character of the revolutionary struggle. For example, we must not only energetically support student demonstrations, demonstrations of pickets, mass demonstrations of the Congress, etc., but take part in their organisation, and not remain on one side. At the same time we must spread our agitation everywhere, exposing the treacherous and bourgeois character of the national-reformists, fighting against the leadership of the National Congress, expressing *our* Communist attitude to all questions. It is the direct duty of a Communist to energetically organise activity, to fight for the independent leadership of the masses, to isolate the reformists, etc., using every occasion for this, intervening in every current question. True, the Indian Communists are still extremely weak in the labour movement, and must therefore prominently bring forward *the winning and consolidation of their positions in the working class*, but at the present period of the development of the mass anti-imperialist struggle and the rise of the agrarian movement, it is only possible to achieve this by combining this work with participation in the social struggle. We cannot remain on one side refraining from interference in any question, because:

"Anyone who hastens away from such interference, in reality (whatever his intentions) gives way to liberalism (in the given case, to the National Congress—Author), handing over to it the political education of the workers, giving up the hegemony of the political struggle to elements who in the long run are supporters of the present society" (Lenin, Vol. IV., Russian ed.).

The consciousness of the working class cannot be genuinely political Communist consciousness: "if the workers are not trained to respond to every case of arbitrariness and oppression, violence and abuse, whatever class it affects, and should respond precisely from the social-democratic (read Communist—Author) point of view and not from any other. The consciousness of the workers cannot be true class-consciousness if the workers do not learn by concrete facts, particularly burning questions and events, to observe every one of the other social classes in all manifestations of the mental, moral and political life of these classes, if they do not learn to apply in practice a materialist analysis and a materialist estimate of all sides of the activity and life of all classes, strata and groups of the population. Anyone who directs

the attention, observation and consciousness of the working class exclusively or even primarily to it, is not a social-democrat (read Communist—Author), because the consciousness of the working class is indissolubly connected with the fullest clearness not only theoretically, or rather not so much theoretically as by the experience of political life worked out by conceptions of the mutual relations of all classes of modern society" (Lenin, Vol. IV.).

The participation of the Indian proletariat in the national revolution, in the struggle for independence, land and the power of the workers and peasants, must be expressed by separating into an *independent* class force, not merging into the petty bourgeoisie of the towns as sometimes happens with some comrades, not suffering from the half-heartedness, instability, irresoluteness of the intermediate classes, and with all the greater enthusiasm fighting for the cause of the people, of the whole of the working people, at the head of the whole people, and especially the toiling peasants, for complete independence, for the destruction of landlord-usurer servitude and all the relics of feudalism in the whole social order of India, for the workers' and peasants' Soviet power, in this way *cleansing and preparing the path to the struggle for socialism*.

THE ABILITY TO COMBINE LEGAL AND ILLEGAL WORK.

Another side of the actual self-isolation of the Communists from the mass independence movement has been the inability to combine legal and illegal forms of work. The necessity of forming an *illegal* Communist Party is recognised, although it is not always carried out. In a number of districts, one of the most serious problems is still the difficulty of passing from legal to illegal forms of work and organisation (while preserving and developing legal forms of mass work), the difficulty of guarding the cadres of the Party from police destruction and provocation.

However, the construction of an illegal Communist Party and the development of illegal and semi-legal forms of work not only does not reduce, but, on the contrary, still more emphatically stresses the *necessity* for the simultaneous development of the legal and illegal forms of mass organisation. The incapable utilisation of legal possibilities by the Indian Communists in 1930 and 1931 objectively assisted the bourgeoisie to support and spread reformist illusions among the workers, to support the idea among the backward circles of the proletariat that the National Congress is carrying on a struggle for freedom and defending the interests of the masses of the people. On the question of the struggle in the streets and the utilisation of legal possibilities, the III. Congress

of the Russian Bolshevik Party in 1905 adopted a resolution which, with certain "amendments" for Indian circumstances, is very useful for the Communists of India to study. In this resolution, it says :—

"In view of the fact that (1) the revolutionary movement in Russia has somewhat shaken and disorganised the monarchy, which has been forced to allow freedom of political activity to a considerable extent to the classes hostile to it; (2) that this freedom of political action is used by the bourgeois classes, thus still further strengthening their political superiority over the working class and increasing the danger of converting the proletariat into a simple appendage of bourgeois democracy; (3) that among the working masses the striving towards independent open action on the political arena is widening more and more, although without any participation of social democracy (now Communists), the III. Congress calls the attention of all Party organisations to the fact that it is necessary :

(a) to utilise all and every case of the open political activity of society and the people in the press, in the unions and at meetings, to put forward the independent class demands of the proletariat in opposition to general democratic demands, for the development of its class-consciousness, for the organisation

of it in the course of such action into an independent socialist (nowadays Communist) force.

(b) To utilise all legal and semi-legal methods for the formation of workers' societies and organisations, in which case it is necessary to strive to assure a prevalence of social democratic (read Communist — Author) influence in such societies, to the conversion of them into base points of the Communist Party" (Lenin, Vol. XVII. Draft Resolution).

The bourgeoisie attempt to direct the growing awakening of the workers, the strivings towards organisation, etc., along channels of reformism, and to convert the proletariat into a "simple appendage" of the bourgeoisie. The correct utilisation of legal and illegal forms of work and organisation pre-supposes the most energetic construction and development of the illegal Communist organisation, the formation of cells in the factories and Communist fractions in the mass organisations to be carried on *simultaneously*. This is one of the main prerequisites so that Communist leadership will be guaranteed, and the hegemony of the proletariat be established in the movement of the whole people.

(To be continued.)