

III

Ultras' Thesis : Inverted Advocacy of Congress Rule

TAKE THE UTILIZATION OF BOURGEOIS PARLIAM-entary institutions. The anti-Leninist-Party elements have attacked and have been attacking the Party for following a revisionist line. They opine that the Party should have boycotted the elections for the situation was becoming revolutionary every day—and did not Lenin boycott the Duma?

Listen to the following gem : “The Indian parliament and democracy, it can be said, is an expanded edition of what was introduced by British imperialism.” No one had glorified British imperialism in this fashion before.

They say it was possible “to persuade the masses to boycott the elections, if conscious efforts were made to bring to its natural culmination the from which the mass movements displayed in the different States, especially in West Bengal, and to raise the movements to a higher stage. But without making any attempts towards this, the movement was terminated—under the slogan of a bigger movement—in the 48-hour strike and hartal, and now that the elections are due all thinking has been concentrated on elections, on the pretext of the election-mindedness of the people. This is dangerous opportunism.”

ELECTIONS AND THE PARTY

It is no use telling these people that through the elections the Party could approach vaster sections of the population than it could do otherwise; that it could, as it did in the Election Manifesto, take to the people the entire Programme of the Party—the programme of People's Democratic Revolution—could unmask before millions the conspiracies of American imperialism, the reactionary class character of the bourgeois-landlord State led by the big bourgeoisie, contrast our Programme with the

programme of other parties, secure a huge forum to fight the anti-China madness created during the period when the Party leadership was in jail; that the Party got an opportunity to demand a straight anti-Congress vote from the people and inflict an electoral defeat on the Congress in as many places as possible so that the confidence of the people to plunge into the looming class battles was heightened; that even in the present changing situation the State Assemblies and Parliament can be used to rouse the people, to unmask the class character of the bourgeois-landlord State. This forum is not necessary, according to them. At best, you may participate in election campaigns without fighting for seats; only propagate but do not touch the seats; fighting for seats is parliamentarism—this is how they argue.

And in advocating this, at one place they say : “You are again preparing to throw the entire Party into the coming general election, thus exposing our best cadres to face bourgeois repression (which inevitably follows as our own experience has taught us), instead of exposing through our legal struggles the real nature of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, i.e. fascism, to the masses. You have formed in West Bengal a United Left Front Bloc (and you are planning to do the same in Kerala and other States)—an alliance of the proletarian Party with social revolutionaries and bourgeois social reformists—with the serious intention of forming a coalition Government by means of a parliamentary majority” (*Anonymous Letter to P.B. and C.C.*).

SAME AS THE CONGRESS SAYS

First gem : parliamentary democracy is fascism—once more, glorification of fascism. It seems the late Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini had introduced parliamentary democracy in Germany and Italy respectively. Let us, however, pass over this profound formulation.

The point is that parliamentary democracy is fascism, you should not have united front with any other political party, you should not form a ministry, it is a sin to try to secure a majority in the legislatures and oust the Congress from ministerial posts.

Is it not inverted advocacy of the Congress rule? The

Congress rulers themselves repeatedly propagated that the United Front was a combination of desperate elements, of opportunists, etc. They did not know the phraseology about social revolutionaries and bourgeois reformists—otherwise they could have as well used it.

And why are they opposed to the non-Congress Ministries? They are afraid that these Ministries might give some relief to the distressed masses and that will divert the masses from revolution. Poor masses! They cannot have even the least respite from acute starvation, for that might corrupt them. They, therefore, call on all genuine Marxists to expose the class character of the non-Congress Government and, no doubt, they will be liberally helped in this by Congress agents.

Listen again: "The non-Congress Government in West Bengal is a Government of the Congress under a different signboard." They object to our description that the Government is supported by the people. "A Government of Congress under a different signboard is a Government supported by the people—indeed, oh, what Himalayan scholarship," they comment against us. So the non-Congress United Front Government is another signboard for the Congress; it is not even supported by the people. (This means that the United Front parties have organized a coup or have cheated the people. Congressmen should embrace these people and say, oh brothers, we did not know you were our fifth column!)

ILLUSIONS : WHOSE ?

And yet there is a difference between this Government and the original Congress Government, according to them. That is why they are more opposed to the non-Congress Government than the Congress Government. In one of their documents there is, of course, no call to fight or expose the Congress Government in the States or the Central Government, but a call only to expose the non-Congress Government. Why? In this period of political crisis in India, it is the task of all genuine Marxists to expose before the masses the real face of this non-Congress Government; for this Government through devious bourgeois tactics will give the people such concessions as will divert their

attention from the main enemy.

The cat is out of the bag. These people think that the non-Congress Government, unlike the Congress Government, can make such concessions as will blunt the revolutionary zeal of the people. Do they understand what they are saying? Who has real illusions about bourgeois democracy which they describe as fascism? We have been telling the people not to expect much, as real power is not in the hands of the people and their representatives. We have been telling that the real levers of power are in the hands of the capitalists and landlords and the Ministry can only act as the instrument of people's mobilization and struggle and not of solving basic problems. And here these pseudo-Lefts are feeling panicky that the non-Congress Ministry, in the midst of the worst economic crisis, might make such concessions that the people will be diverted from the struggles.

LACK OF RESPECT FOR MASSES

And, secondly, what lack of respect for our revolutionary masses this contemptible crowd has. Their idea about the masses does not differ from that of the Congress or the capitalist bosses. They all think that, after all, these ignorant masses can be controlled with a few crumbs. Do these gentlemen think that if the non-Congress Government in West Bengal is able to relieve economic distress of the people to some extent, and our famished people who are victims of unemployment, starvation and high prices, do require immediate relief, and the Ministry should do everything in its power to render it, the basic questions will be solved and the people will retreat from struggle? Or will their confidence increase? The *disproportion* between their expectations after electoral victory and the actual relief they are getting, will it not make them realize more quickly that unless the entire set-up is upturned, no radical improvement can take place in their condition?

This fear that there might be big concessions diverting attention of the people from the main enemy, also exposes the superficial character of their analysis of the situation. Lifting some phrases from Lenin's writings they declare that the tradition of

general strike is developing (needless to say, that do not understand the significance of general strike), masses are showing new militancy ; a new content is developing; and yet all this perspective suddenly collapses if a few concessions are made to the masses! Can you beat the acrobatics of these 'revolutionaries' ?

The fact is that in their analysis containing tall phrases, there is no basic understanding of the crisis ; no sympathy even for the people who are going through the most excruciating misery. That is why they openly say concessions are dangerous. The logic of their policy is that in the elections the people should only vote for the Congress so that they will get no concessions and they will be ever ready for revolution.

PARTY LINE PROVED RIGHT

According to them, we should have boycotted the elections; non-Congress Governments are more dangerous than Congress Government because they might give concessions to the people; hence fire must be concentrated against them ; the non-Congress Government in West Bengal is just a signboard for the Congress Government ; the Indian situation is developing along the path of revolution so rapidly that there is no need to shatter election illusions through the use of the parliamentary forum for purposes of exposure and addressing the people ; no need of ministries in the States to expose the ruling class, the sham character of power in the States and the entire bourgeois-landlord State apparatus ; nor any need to use the Ministry as an instrument of struggle. In short, in the present period, only direct revolutionary struggle is necessary ; auxiliary forms of struggle—at least in relation to Parliament—are out of date.

As the readers will see, this line has nothing in common with the Party's line ; it logically follows from their characterization of the State, and only hinders the task of releasing the masses from the ideological and political influence of other parties. If put into practice, it will successfully isolate the Party from the masses just when they are moving into the revolutionary arena.

Experience has shown that the line followed by our Party—of fighting the elections, of sending our comrades to the legislatures, of forming united fronts with other parties without com-

promising the independence of our Party, of popularizing our entire Programme, including basic slogans and the India-China question, of putting forward the slogan of alternative Ministries in Kerala and West Bengal, of participating in these Ministries—has been a correct one.

Even in weaker States it has enabled us to approach the broad masses and popularize our basic slogans, exposing the class character of the present State ; it enabled us to carry forward our battle against the revisionists among the masses. In our stronger States it has enabled us to consolidate our mass following earned through previous class battles, and mould it politically ; it has further enabled us to approach broader sections politically, batter down the prejudices created on the India-China question, isolate the main party of the bourgeoisie, defeat the Congress at the polls and ourselves emerge as the strongest force in the opposition.

This has led to a radicalization of the masses, keenness to know about political developments and a much greater faith in us as the most steadfast party leading the masses. In the midst of raging calumny from friends and foes alike, the people have shown increased faith in us by giving us thumping victories in the municipal elections in West Bengal.

All this confidence and strength can be used to advance the mass movement still further, to strengthen the organizational and political base for the looming revolutionary battles to which the masses are moving under the stress of the crisis. If we do not use it for accelerating mass struggle, then, of course, it will be opportunism.

PARTY FOLLOWS LENINIST TACTICS

The political results we are trying to achieve—isolation of the main party of the bourgeoisie, advancement of the ideology of the Party, and releasing the people and the working class from the grip of bourgeois ideology, increasing people's confidence in themselves as against the bourgeois-landlord government led by the big bourgeoisie—the opposition inside the Party, in its foolishness, considers as faith in parliamentarism, faith in the parliamentary road to Socialism. Who has ever talked of power

through elections? Is not our Party repeatedly warning that electoral victories are formal victories? If still these gentlemen charge us with following the parliamentary path, it only means that they are totally opposed to the use of Parliament as a forum.

And because they cannot openly advocate this anarchist line, they pretend as if our Party is trying to capture power through elections, and waste their energy in hunting out quotations to tell us with a serious face that parliamentarism means opportunism. It is their business to go on making assertions without any proof to dupe the unfortunate, then mix the assertion with a quotation of Lenin.

Here we follow the Leninist tactic of utilizing Parliament as a forum; and they hurl a quotation saying power cannot be captured through Parliament. When you give the slogan of a Coalition Ministry, they say you are trying to build a New Democratic State by peaceful means. Don't laugh! But this is what they seriously say: "But are you not teaching us the path of peaceful transition to the New Democratic State by the parliamentary means through your actual practice of forming electoral blocs and alliances with the bourgeois social reformists, with the intention of forming 'coalition government' at State levels, in Bengal, Kerala, and other States?" (*Letter to P.B. & C.C.*). This statement will no doubt go down as the champion lie of the year. But this gentry must invent something about the Party, falsify things, so that they can appear as extremists; with their ideological bankruptcy they cannot fight the line of the Party as it exists, they must first interpret it as they like and then attack it. They dare not quote because then their blindness will be evident.

LENIN ON BOYCOTT

In another document they make a sober statement, that participation or non-participation in Parliament is to be decided by whether such participation helps or obstructs the development of revolution. And in this latter phrase, the release of the masses from the influence of compromising or bourgeois parties should be included. Of course, they make a wrong estimate of

the present situation and, without any valid reason, decide that elections should be boycotted.

At the same time they also state that elections should be subordinated to the main aim—organizing of revolution. That, of course, is correct. Parliamentary activity must always be subordinated to the needs of developing the revolutionary struggle, the revolution. It does not, however, directly follow from this that in the present Indian situation, rapidly heading for a crisis, participation in elections, etc., was not necessary. If in the coming few months the crisis becomes so acute that the ruling classes have to suppress legislatures, or arrest all the legislators, etc., then a different situation will arise.

It is necessary in this connection to understand Leninist tactics in Lenin's words: "In 1908 the 'Left' Bolsheviks were expelled from our Party for stubbornly refusing to understand the necessity of participating in a most reactionary 'parliament'." (Gentlemen, Lenin did not consider such participation to be parliamentarism!) The 'Left'—among whom there were many splendid revolutionaries who subsequently were (and still are) commendable members of the Communist Party—based themselves particularly on the successful experience of the 1905 boycott. When in August 1905, the tsar proclaimed the convocation of a consultative 'parliament', the Bolsheviks called for its boycott, in the teeth of all the opposition parties and the Mensheviks, and the 'parliament' was in fact swept away by the revolution of October 1905. The boycott proved correct at the time, not because non-participation in reactionary parliaments is correct in general, but because we accurately appraised the objective situation, which was leading to the rapid development of the mass strike, first into a political strike, then into a revolutionary strike, and finally into an uprising. . . . When there was not, and could not be, any certainty that the objective situation was of a similar kind, and when there was no certainty of a similar trend and the same rate of development, the boycott was no longer correct" (*'Left-Wing' Communism*).

Lenin here describes the situation in which the boycott was correct and the conditions in which it was wrong. The dissidents who refer to the boycott of the Duma and also wanted a boycott in India—will they now understand their error? While they

talk about the revolutionary elements in the situation, they themselves say that they neither contemplate uprising nor insurrection, i.e. a rapid climax in the present situation.

To continue with Lenin: "The Bolsheviks' boycott of 'parliament' in 1905 enriched the revolutionary proletariat with highly valuable political experience and showed that when legal and illegal, parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle are combined, it is sometimes useful and even essential to reject parliamentary forms. It would, however, be highly erroneous to apply this experience blindly, imitatively and uncritically to other conditions and other situations. The Bolsheviks' boycott of the Duma in 1906 was a mistake, although a minor and easily remediable one. The boycott of the Duma in 1907, 1908 and subsequent years was a most serious one and difficult to remedy, because on the one hand, a very rapid rise of the revolutionary tide and its conversion into an uprising was not to be expected, and on the other hand the entire historical situation attendant on the renovation of the bourgeois monarchy called for legal and illegal activities being combined" (*Left-Wing' Communism, Collected Works*, vol. 31, p. 36).

Once more Lenin repeats the conditions for successful boycott—rapid rise of the revolutionary tide and its conversion into an uprising. Gentlemen, do you accept this? And do you still consider that your light-hearted advocacy of boycott was correct?

LEVEL OF PEOPLE'S CONSCIOUSNESS

In judging whether Communists should participate in bourgeois parliaments—of course, to further the class struggle, expose the ruling classes and the character of the class rule—the level of the consciousness of the people has also to be taken into account. The dissidents rail at the Party for participating in elections and say you are doing this in the name of election-mindedness of the people. But Lenin will teach them that this factor also has to be taken into account not only in ordinary times but even in time of decisive revolutionary periods in order to win over the backward masses. "Parliamentarianism has become 'historically obsolete'. That is true in the propa-

ganda sense. However, everybody knows that this is still a far cry from overcoming it in *practice*; capitalism could have been declared—and with full justice—to be 'historically obsolete' many decades ago, but that does not at all remove the need for a very long and very persistent struggle *on the basis of capitalism*. Parliamentarianism is 'historically obsolete' from the standpoint of world history, i.e., the *era* of bourgeois parliamentarianism is over, and the *era* of the proletarian dictatorship has *begun*. That is incontestable. But world history is counted in decades. Ten or twenty years earlier or later make no differences when measured with the yardstick of world history; from the standpoint of world history it is a trifle that cannot be considered even approximately. But for that very reason, it is a glaring theoretical error to apply the yardstick of world history to practical politics.

"Is parliamentarianism 'politically obsolete'? That is quite a different matter. If that were true, the position of the 'Lefts' would be a strong one. . . It is obvious that parliamentarianism in Germany is *not yet* politically obsolete. It is obvious that the 'Lefts' in Germany have mistaken their desire, their politico-ideological attitude, for objective reality. That is a most dangerous mistake for revolutionaries to make. In Russia—where, over a particularly long period and in particularly varied forms, the most brutal and savage yoke of tsarism produced revolutionaries of diverse shades, revolutionaries who displayed amazing devotion, enthusiasm, heroism and will power—in Russia we have observed this mistake of the revolutionaries at very close quarters; we have studied it very attentively and have a first-hand knowledge of it; that is why we can also see it especially clearly in others. Parliamentarianism is, of course, politically obsolete to the Communists in Germany, but—and that is the whole point—we must *not* regard what is obsolete *to us* as something obsolete *to a class, to the masses*. Here again we find that the 'Lefts' do not know how to reason, do not know how to act as the party of a *class*, as the party of *masses*. You must not sink to the level of the masses, to the level of the backward strata of the class. That is incontestable. You must tell them the bitter truth. You are in duty bound to call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices what they

are—prejudices. But at the same time you must *soberly* follow the *actual* state of the class-consciousness and preparedness of the entire class (not only of its Communist vanguard) and of all the *working people* (not only of their advanced elements)” (*Collected Works*, vol. 31, p. 58). □

IV

Phrase-Mongering Replaces Building up of Struggles

LENIN, THAT STRICT AND RIGOROUS MARXIST, WHO ridiculed the parliamentary cretinism of the reformist Social-Democrats, laid down strict rules about the utilization of parliamentary institutions by the revolutionary proletariat for furthering the revolutionary struggle, for removing the constitutional illusions of the backward masses. He did not forget to participate in them even in the period of highest revolutionary activity of the masses to quicken the process of releasing them from faith in bourgeois parliamentarism.

Listen to the following: “Third, the ‘Left’ Communists have a great deal to say in praise of us Bolsheviki; one feels like telling them to praise us less and try to get a better knowledge of the Bolshevik ‘tactics’. We took part in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, the Russian bourgeois Parliament, in September-November 1917. Were our tactics correct? . . . In September 1917, did we, the Russian Bolsheviki, not have more rights than any Western Communist to consider that parliamentarianism was politically obsolete in Russia? Of course we did, for the point is not whether bourgeois parliaments have existed for a long time or a short time, but how far the masses of the working people are prepared (ideologically, politically and practically) to accept the Soviet system and to