

CHAPTER I

The Indian Liberation Movement

IN 1947, with the transfer of power from British Imperialism to the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, the Indian National Liberation Movement entered a new phase of its history. A product of various trends working together, this movement had grown through an almost ceaseless course of struggles between different ideas and ideologies along with wider and wider mobilization of the people against Imperialism. The people's urge for "Freedom to Live" had already begun to be felt within the movement and the people had begun to look upon "Independence" as not merely a replacement of the foreign rulers by a set of native rulers, as not a mere change of masters, but as the removal of a major obstacle in the way of a better life for the Indian masses. Socialist ideas had developed within the movement, greatly inspired by the Great October Revolution in Russia. The movement had developed an international outlook, and there was a growing awareness that the Indian national struggle was an integral part of the world-struggle of the enslaved peoples against imperialist oppression and exploitation, and also allied with the world-struggle of the toiling masses against capitalist and imperialist exploitation. Close fraternal feelings were being developed for the oppressed peoples of Asia and Africa, and the working people

of the imperialist countries were being increasingly looked upon as allies in the struggle against imperialism.

Forms of Struggle Against Imperialism

2. The history of the movement had been rich in practical experiences of different forms of struggle, and struggles waged by different sections of the people. Peasant revolts at various times of various intensity, the Great Mutiny of 1857, reform campaigns, cultural and educational movements, attempts at organized armed struggles, parliamentary struggles, peaceful civil disobedience and passive resistance, boycott-campaigns, strikes and general close-downs, struggles for civil rights, peaceful mass movements, peaceful mass movements breaking out into sporadic violent attacks on the enemy, parliamentary struggles linked with extra-parliamentary struggles, no-tax campaigns, workers' trade union struggle and massive strike-demonstrations, massive student demonstrations often leading to clashes with the police and the army, revolts in the army and the navy, armed guerilla attacks on enemy personnel and enemy strongholds, armed struggles on local scales, and various other kinds of legal and illegal struggles—all had built up a rich fund of knowledge about these forms and their respective limitations. These struggles had also unfolded different kinds of leadership in their characteristic actions—reformists and reactionaries, capitulationists and moderates, adventurists and ultra-revolutionaries, opportunists and sectarians, pacifists and agent-provateurs, etc. on one hand, and the heroic martyrs of hallowed memory, fearless

and self-less patriots, brilliant agitators and organizers, tireless fighters ever looking for a correct path for liberation, and far-sighted revolutionaries, on the other hand. Some of the finest qualities of the Indian people were discovered and developed in the course of this movement, along with some of the most backward elements in the country.

3. The movement had also registered a great advance by evolving its own instrument of struggles in the shape of the Primary Congress Committees which had the possibility of developing into future organs of power of the people. All sectional and immediate struggles of the people came under the hegemony of the National Liberation Movement, receiving help and support from the general movement,—often in spite of a half-hearted and unwilling leadership—becoming part and parcel of the general movement, and in their turn helping the movement to spread and consolidate.

Bourgeois Leadership of the Movement

4. But the movement had suffered from the inevitable consequences of its bourgeois leadership. The Indian bourgeoisie established their leadership in the national movement in an epoch when the bourgeoisie as a class had already exhausted its revolutionary role in world-history and was no longer in the van of the world-historical movement. In its struggle against British Imperialism the Indian bourgeoisie and their political ideologues were more dominated by their fear of mass revolutionary uprisings that might lead to changing of existing property-relations than by their hostility against

foreign imperialism. The exigencies of the First World War having compelled British Imperialism to permit a certain limited growth to Indian capitalism, a programme of alternating threats and compromises aimed at attainment of power through the consent of imperialism was the logical bourgeois programme in the Liberation Movement at this time. In their struggle for supremacy against feudalism and feudal relics, too, the Indian bourgeoisie followed a general policy of accomodation and gradual absorption instead of a revolutionary attack on feudal property.

5. The bourgeois leadership not only restrained the National Liberation Movement from developing along its logical course indicated by world-history, but it also neglected to consolidate the mass bases of the movement by taking up the cause of the different sections of the people as the cause of the Liberation Movement. Wedded to a system of competition for profit giving rise to and fomenting antagonistic conflicts of interests between various classes and sections, communities and castes, the bourgeois leadership failed to find a satisfactory solution of the problem of minorities that could create confidence in the minds of the minorities themselves, and thus failed to win over the Muslim masses, for example, from the reactionary communal leadership of the Muslim League ; on the other hand, it failed to eradicate the equally reactionary Hindu communalist trends and elements from within the movement. Imperialism had all along taken full advantage of the communal dissensions in this country. The failure of the leadership to counter the imperialist

game effectively led finally to the disastrous communal riots of 1946-47 ; the bourgeois leadership had to accept the partition of the country along with the transfer of power, unable as it was to rely on a revolutionary unity of the Indian people for overthrowing imperialism.

6. As a result of the bourgeois leadership and its mistakes, characteristic of its class, the Indian National Liberation Movement, inspite of its many achievements and rich experiences, could not culminate in a country-wide mass revolutionary struggle for seizure of power. The bourgeois leaders preached 'non-violence' ; but experiences prove that they only disliked violence against imperialism. Even before independence when they held office in a number of provinces under the British Government, they employed police-violence against strikers ; after independence, the bourgeois government has surpassed the British imperialist record in numbers of people killed and disabled by police-violence. The fetish of non-violence was used by the bourgeois leadership for the purpose of de-radicalization of the movement. It is a fact of history that the bourgeois efforts for a peaceful transfer of power produced a situation in which thousands of lives were lost by suicidal fights among the Indian people. The bourgeoisie's path to power lay through death and destruction and blood and tears of millions of Indian people, while the imperialists were untouched by any danger.

7. The bourgeois leadership of the Indian National Liberation Movement was a historical anachronism. This anachronism could have been removed only through a process of the movement itself. The process, however, was interrupted by the Second World War.

The Second World War

8. Prior to the Second World War, the forces within the Indian National Liberation Movement were being aligned for a National Democratic Revolution. The struggle between the Left and Right within the Indian National Congress had assumed very sharp forms ; although the struggle was focussed on the question of a call for an uncompromising armed revolutionary anti-imperialist mass uprising versus peaceful passive resistance coupled with negotiations for a compromise, the course of this struggle was opening up possibilities for replacing the bourgeois leadership by a multi-class leadership under the ideological influence of the working-class. Such a leadership could have led the Liberation Movement through a revolutionary mass struggle for seizure of power to a Democratic Republic based on an alliance of the working class, the peasantry, the urban middle class, and sections of the national bourgeoisie collaborating with the revolutionary masses. Such a National Democratic Republic would have been a transitional step towards socialism, historically necessary at that time.

9. But the Indian National Movement was totally unprepared for the new historical tasks that were soon brought to the fore by the Second World War at this stage. Defeat of the fascist military powers became the pre-condition now for any advance of the Liberation Movement in India, as everywhere else. The Indian movement, however, failed to recognize this task as its own task. A few voices were raised against fascism, and there were clear-sighted revolutionaries who courageously advocated

a tactics of co-operation with the war-efforts of the British Government which was forced by circumstances to undertake a war against the fascist powers. This was the most revolutionary tactics of the day, but the movement as a whole refused to follow this lead. The bulk of the militant forces within the movement had been demanding an uncompromising revolutionary struggle against the foreign rulers, and they could not adjust themselves to the requirements of this new situation. The simple logic that shows the enemy of one's enemies as one's friend prevailed ; and nationalist feelings, isolated from world-events and at odds with the international task, backed by the pre-dominantly petty-bourgeois character of the militant forces, swayed the people. The numerical weakness of the working-class, the weakness of working-class organizations, the weakness of their impact on the national liberation movement, and the general cultural backwardness were some of the reasons behind this failure of the movement. These factors were reflected also in the absence of an organized leadership of the working class at that time.

10. There was a Communist Party ; but this was in fact a petty-bourgeois group, entirely dominated by bourgeois nationalism. It failed to recognize the anti-fascist character of the war for a pretty long time ; even when, under international guidance, it turned a volte-face and began co-operating with the war-efforts of the British Government, it failed to recognize the new alignment of forces in India, and went on with a bourgeois-nationalist programme.

11. The Indian bourgeoisie, as a class, was not keen on fighting fascism. At first it sought to use the war for exerting pressure on the British Government to secure some major concessions. Then as the fascist military forces went on rapidly advancing and the scales appeared to turn considerably in favour of the fascist powers, the Indian bourgeoisie developed "conscientious objections" against the war; sections of the bourgeois leadership developed feelings of kinship with the fascist dictators; as a fascist victory seemed nearer and nearer, the bourgeois leadership became more and more 'uncompromising' against the British imperialists.

12. The failure of the Indian Liberation Movement to take an active part in the world-struggle against fascism deprived the movement of the advantages of another course of development that opened up in many countries during and after the Second World War. This was the course of People's Democratic Revolution. Based on an anti-fascist alliance of democratic forces led by the working-class—the most consistent and determined fighter against fascism—developed through actual armed conflict against invading fascist armies—isolating the bourgeois collaborators with fascism—mobilizing the patriotic forces against the fascist armies which appeared as foreign imperialist invaders—the People's Democratic Fronts in some countries moved on to People's Democratic Republics which emerged as yet another transitional step towards socialism. Active and conscious participation in the war against the fascist powers would have enabled the Indian Liberation Movement to develop similarly, with mighty

instruments of revolutionary mass struggle and other equipment necessary for a final onslaught against Imperialism at the end of the war.

13. The Second World War left the Indian bourgeoisie considerably strengthened. Although its political leadership had refused to co-operate with the war-efforts of the British Government, the bourgeoisie derived huge profits from war productions. The balance of trade between India and Britain changed in favour of India now, and the Indian Government now had a considerable amount in Sterling Balances. A number of enterprises also changed hands at the end of the war from British to Indian capitalist ownership.

14. The bargaining power of the Indian bourgeoisie was considerably increased. The bourgeois leadership was also able to capitalize on its apparently uncompromising attitude against the British rulers during the war, and had an unquestioning mass following at the end of the war. Left elements had already been eliminated from the Indian National Congress and the Congress was transformed to a party of the bourgeoisie from a Liberation Front. Anti-communist and anti-Marxist propaganda was carried on by the bourgeois leaders; workers' organizations were divided, and mass movements disrupted. The mighty Liberation Movement was now broken up into party-sectarian organizations of various sorts.

15. A new wave of spontaneous anti-imperialist mass demonstrations and a mounting tempo of popular militancy against the British imperialists was a very noticeable fact in the situation at the end of

the war. On the crest of this wave of anti-imperialism the bourgeoisie organized in the Congress as a political party entered into negotiations with imperialism.

Transfer of Power

16. Power was transferred by British Imperialism not so much as a result of pressure exerted by the bourgeois Congress Party, but more as a result of the greatly changed world-situation at the end of the war. British Imperialism found that it could not hope to rule over India for long ; the situation inside India was fast developing to a crisis ; and there were mighty forces in the world outside, unfavourable to Britain. Britain emerged out of the war as a second-rate power, exhausted, fatigued and completely dependent on the USA ; American Imperialism, strengthened enormously by war-profits, and now the undisputed leader of world-capitalism, did not favour British monopoly rule over such a vast territory as India. It wanted India to be open to American influence.

17. On the other side, the Soviet Union was never a friend of imperialist rule anywhere. Although it had to bear the brunt of the Nazi military attack in Europe and suffer tremendous losses in manpower and wealth, yet it was the strongest country in Europe now. The heroic resistance of the Soviet people against the Nazi invaders, the great victory in Stalingrad, and the final dazzling victorious rush of the Red Army into the heart of the citadel of fascism, had earned great respect and popularity for the Soviet Union throughout the world ; the Soviet

system was being looked upon as the source of this unparalleled heroism of millions of people. The Soviet Union had become a mighty factor to reckon with.

18. In addition, eight countries of East Europe, liberated by the Red Army and their respective People's Liberation Committees led by the working class, had passed out of the capitalist world-system. In the Far East, the Chinese people's revolutionary struggle for liberation from imperialist and feudal bondage was advancing without any doubt of its imminent victory. The whole of South East Asia was ablaze with the flames of revolutionary mass uprisings and armed struggles against foreign imperialist rule. The increased strength of the socialist camp and its wide influence greatly stimulated this revolutionary swing.

19. Aware of the rising strength of the socialist camp and the consequent danger to imperialism, British and American imperialists were already engaged in planning for a Third World War aimed against the USSR and the socialist camp. The character of the capitalist-imperialist economic system also generated this planning for war. The strategical requirements of such an anti-Soviet and anti-socialist war indicated that the best course for British imperialism was to transfer power to Indian capitalists with a view to secure the willing co-operation of the Indian bourgeoisie in the event of war, or at least to eliminate the possibility of India siding with the USSR. British imperialism also realised that a prolongation of the national liberation struggle in India would bring about changes in the leadership of the movement and raise a new leadership entirely

opposed to the interests of the world-system of capitalism, and to any agreement with British Imperialism. From this point of view too, the best course for imperialism was to transfer power to the political representatives of Indian capitalism who could be trusted to stem the tide of socialism in India and suppress the proletarian forces, fully exploiting bourgeois national chauvinism for this purpose. With the prestige earned through the national struggle for independence to help them, with the support of the entire bourgeois national press and other mass media at their command, with a social base inside the country, the Indian bourgeois leadership could further these interests of imperialism far more effectively than British imperialism itself.

20. These were the long-range expectations that determined the attitude of British imperialism at this time. It may be said that the Indian bourgeoisie have tried their best to fulfil these expectations of imperialism.