

The Indian Revolutionary Emigration in Soviet Russia

The left national-revolutionary elements hold a conspicuous place in the history of the social movement in British India, particularly in the period after the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. They began to form as far back as the early 20th century (Tilak et al.), but acquired a more distinct ideological and political colouring and to a certain extent a capacity to set up independent political organisations in the 1920s. For this they had had to go through the school of political emigration and prior to that the majority of them had waged a long terrorist struggle against the British colonialist apparatus and, lastly, the cream of them had gradually assimilated Marxist ideology. All this was an arduous test, and not all of them withstood it. Many revolutionary figures of that time left the ranks of the left wing of the Indian National Congress party. Both groups later produced outstanding organisers — the founders of the Indian working-class and communist movement.

Let us turn to the Indian revolutionary emigration in Russia which emerged after the victory of the October Revolution.*

The emigration flow to the Soviet Union of Indian anti-

* The Indian revolutionary emigration in Russia is the subject of the well-documented work *Revolutsionery Indii v Strane Sovietov* (Revolutionaries of India in the Land of Soviets) by M. A. Persits, Moscow, 1973.

imperialist revolutionaries, fighters for the freedom and independence of their homeland—a story full of drama, revolutionary romanticism, sincerity and enthusiasm—was made possible by the profound, multiform and extremely fruitful impact of the October Revolution on the colonial and dependent peoples oppressed by imperialism, which were rising against their foreign masters. This flow could not be stopped either by the Himalayas or the Hindu Kush mountains or by the all-seeing and all-knowing Intelligence Service, or by the cruel British colonial administration.

Tsarist Russia had received in its Central Asian possessions only Indian merchants and moneybags. The few Indian national-revolutionaries who found themselves here before the October Revolution by no means enjoyed the sympathies of the official authorities. After the Revolution the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic became a shelter for Indian revolutionaries seeking support in their struggle for national independence.

Among the Indian national-revolutionaries who came to the Soviet Union there were both politically organised and politically unorganised emigrants, in particular, members of the so-called Provisional Government of India formed as far back as 1915 in Kabul by Raja Mahendra Pratap, and of a group which had broken away from this “government” and formed as the Indian section of the Council for International Propaganda in Tashkent in April 1920. These politically organised groups advanced fairly similar revolutionary-democratic programmes envisaging complete national independence for India and the establishment of the Indian Federative Republic. They exhibited certain socialist tendencies based on egalitarian and other pre-Marxist and generally rather Utopian concepts of the essence of the socialist system. All of them welcomed the October Revolution, whose import they saw, above all, in the implementation of the right of nations to self-determination up to secession. These limited conceptions are quite understandable. The Indian national-revolutionaries had not yet adopted a socialist programme of their own. It is significant, however, that all of them firmly upheld the idea of a strong alliance of the Indian national liberation movement with Soviet Russia. They regarded it with full justification as a herald of freedom and national liberation, a high-principled opponent of British colonialism, a defender of the enslaved Indian people.

Some Indian national-revolutionaries demonstrated their full solidarity with Soviet Russia by defending its socialist revolution against the whiteguards and local *basmachi* gangs by force of arms.

Some leaders and groups, in addition to unquestionably progressive, anti-imperialist views, preserved, sometimes even to a great extent, such elements of their former, pre-October concepts as fear of a mass popular revolution in India, predilection for conspiracy, terrorism, exclusive reliance on violent means of liberating India, up to military intervention by revolutionary Russia to end the British colonial rule.

The Indian section of the Council for International Propaganda in Tashkent underwent perhaps the most successful evolution towards the socialist ideals and came closer than others to the realisation that India's freedom and independence could only be won by an active mass struggle of the Indian people themselves. This realisation was a great achievement of the aforesaid group of revolutionaries, all the more so as it was taking place against the background of the growing mass movement in India itself, which was developing in the Gandhist, non-violent forms of nationwide civil disobedience.

As it follows from an analysis of factual material, the majority of the Indians arriving in Soviet Russia sought to receive primarily military aid to launch a war of liberation in India. They believed that the British rule in India could be overthrown exclusively by force of arms, for which the mass arming of the Indian people and direct military assistance of the Red Army from Russia were necessary. It was not easy to make these national-revolutionaries understand the realities, and it was probably not fortuitous that most of them failed to adopt Marxist ideology.

Some revolutionary emigrants, however, sincerely desired to learn the revolutionary experience of Soviet Russia and Marxism and use it to find a solution to the political and social problems of liberation of their homeland from the British rule. Since the early 1920s such Indian revolutionaries came to Soviet Russia in growing numbers, which evidenced the gradual assimilation of revolutionary Marxist theory by the front-ranking fighters for India's independence. Many of this group of revolutionaries later became the initiators and organisers of the national liberation, working-class, peasant and communist movements in India.

The first communist group arose within the Indian revolutionary emigration in the early 1920s and proclaimed themselves the Communist Party of India, although they never became nor could they become one. The fact is that the formation of the ranks of the Indian Communist Party was a complicated and long-lasting process. In India the small peasantry enslaved by feudals and money-lenders prevailed, the proletariat was relatively small numerically, while the bourgeoisie was more experienced politically than the other classes of the Indian society, the caste and religious traditions predominated and the unbridled British military and political oppression reigned supreme. All this caused a powerful upsurge of the national liberation movement which embraced almost all the classes of the Indian society and advanced the national rather than social problems to the foreground.

The difficulties of the formation of an independent communist movement in India and suchlike countries were quite considerable. It is known that Lenin called in question the very possibility of the formation there in that distant period of the early 1920s of Communist parties made up of proletarian elements and adopting the ideology of Marxism. The fact that the first Indian communist group formed in Soviet Russia within the Indian revolutionary emigration and that the process of the formation of the Communist Party took many years, reflected the difficulties attending the emergence of the communist movement in India.

The social tendencies which became manifest in the Indian people's national liberation struggle and were connected historically with the first independent working-class actions in India's larger centres of capitalist industry (Bombay, Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Madras, Sholapur, etc.) impelled many Indian national-revolutionaries to move closer to scientific socialism, to study the revolutionary practices of the Bolshevik Party in Russia. It was in Marxist theory and in its practical application by Russia's Bolsheviks led by Lenin that the Indian national-revolutionaries sought an answer to the question of how to win national independence for their homeland and go over to the solution of urgent social problems.

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The forms of transition of peoples to socialism are varied. Also varied are the ways by which revolutionaries approach

Marxist ideology, come to accept it without reservations as the only guideline for their revolutionary struggle and all their activities. Many Indian revolutionaries came to the theory of scientific socialism through anti-imperialist nationalism after their disillusionment with the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leadership of the national liberation movement, by overcoming with the aid of the Comintern and Lenin and the Indian Communist Party founded in 1925 their nationalism and petty-bourgeois mentality in the process of the development of the social and class struggle in India itself.

There was yet another feature which became manifest during the formation of the Indian Marxist ranks. It was not specific for India, but India's socio-economic and political conditions not infrequently led to the infection of some early Indian Communists with a persistent form of the "infantile disorder" of leftism. Lenin revealed with utmost clarity and profound tactfulness the reasons for the theoretical untenability of the views of some Indian and other revolutionaries, who were operating under economically and socially immature conditions, which generated various forms of opportunism and nationalism. This should be taken into consideration when speaking of some early Indian Communists, who had come from the midst of petty-bourgeois national-revolutionaries, and who exhibited later, in the 1920s and 1930s, notable digressions from Marxism and proletarian internationalism. Lenin wrote in this context: "Economic relations which are backward, or which lag in their development, constantly lead to the appearance of supporters of the labour movement who assimilate only certain aspects of Marxism, only certain parts of the new world outlook, or individual slogans and demands, being unable to make a determined break with all the traditions of the bourgeois world outlook in general and the bourgeois-democratic world outlook in particular."*

The leftist sectarian views of the early Indian Communists manifested themselves in the early twenties. Manabendra Nath Roy, one of the leaders of the first communist group, denied the possibility and necessity of setting up a united anti-imperialist front with India's national bourgeoisie, which was at the head of the national liberation struggle in that

* V. I. Lenin, "Differences in the European Labour Movement", *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 348.

period. He called for an immediate socialist revolution in the belief that it must and could be called forth with the aid of an intervention from abroad by the armed forces of the Russian Revolution. Guided by these leftist sectarian views, Roy and his followers were leading in fact the emerging Indian communist movement towards isolation from the masses, deprived it of allies in the struggle against imperialism. They interfered with its setting up broad ties with the working class, the working people, who were following in that period the Indian National Congress party and Mahatma Gandhi rather than the little-known communist groups wielding little influence.

In his criticism of the sectarian mistakes of Roy and other lefts at the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin put forward the fundamental principles of the policy of a united anti-imperialist front which, in his opinion, the Communists should pursue in the Eastern countries. While preserving the organisational, ideological and political independence, even in the most rudimentary form, it was mandatory to cooperate with the national-bourgeois and petty-bourgeois national-revolutionary parties with the object of a joint struggle against British imperialism—such was the demand of the time. The establishment of tactical unity with these parties was required historically by the level and tasks of the movement and was an effective form of uniting the anti-imperialist forces fighting against foreign oppression and simultaneously a means of approach by the Communists to the working masses in order to awaken them to a struggle for their social liberation.

Since its line was rejected by the Second Congress of the Comintern, the Roy group proclaimed itself in favour of cooperation between all anti-imperialist forces in India. As experience demonstrated, however, it adhered to its old concept that the Communists alone should be in the vanguard of the national-revolutionary struggle because in their opinion it would assume an exclusively socio-class character in the immediate future, and this would lead to deliverance from bourgeois “sentimental nationalism” allegedly unpopular among the masses. The idea of calling an All-India Revolutionary Congress suggested by Roy was intended not so much to unite members of the Indian anti-imperialist movement as to speed up its transition to a socialist revolution. The attempt to carry this unrealistic idea into effect in 1921 natu-

rally failed. Roy and his followers were unable to agree on calling an All-India Revolutionary Congress not only with the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaders of the national liberation movement in India but also with emigré Indian revolutionary democrats, many of whom were gradually tending towards Marxism. The emigration was in a process of differentiation. The Leninist position was attracting numerous supporters, and a group was being crystallised which sought to use united front tactics in practice.

The early Indian Communists, just as the first Communists in many other countries of the East had still inadequately assimilated Marxist-Leninist theory but they sincerely wished to adopt Marxist ideology. They were well aware of the need, without leaving the battlefield, to study the ideology and practices of scientific socialism. The Comintern afforded them this opportunity by opening the Communist University of the Working People of the East in Moscow early in 1921.

The works of Lenin and the activities of the Comintern had a great role to play in training the leading cadres of the communist movement, which was gradually turning into an independent factor of social life and the class struggle in the Eastern countries.

The Communists of India and other countries of the East assimilated more and more profoundly the Leninist strategy and tactics of the communist movement in the economically backward countries. Now that they have gained immense experience in their own struggle, they are guided by this strategy and tactics in their day-to-day activities. It should be pointed out in this context that as far back as 1922 a group of Indian Communists led by the young revolutionary internationalist S. A. Dange, now President of the National Council of the Communist Party of India, started the publication of the first Marxist newspaper *The Socialist* in Bombay. This was the beginning of a long and intensive struggle for the formation of an illegal party, for the practical application of the Marxist theory to the specific conditions of India.

It is significant that once it had become a large and influential political force, the Communist Party of India at its 9th Congress held late in 1971 put forward the task of "completing the national-democratic revolution" on the basis of a profound analysis of the Indian realities. The first outbreaks of this revolution were observed in the early 1920s. Consequently, the process of struggle for national political

independence took half a century, while Roy already at that time appealed for the establishment of a socialist state in India, skipping all the stages and phases of the democratic revolution. In order that the national-democratic revolution might be completed, the 9th Congress of the Communist Party of India called for setting up a united national-democratic front of the workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the non-monopolistic strata of the national bourgeoisie. In the Communists' opinion, it would be possible within the framework of this front to mobilise the masses to the struggle for implementing the long-overdue economic and political reforms.

Roy also failed to understand the essence of the Leninist conception of a non-capitalist way of development for the undeveloped countries. He believed that the Communists were obliged to ensure an immediate growing over of a national liberation into a socialist revolution. Immature, unrealistic slogans to stimulate the revolutionary process artificially, regardless of the actual social and political situation and hence subjectivism and avant-gardism in strategy and tactics—such were the characteristic features of the left sectarian deviations from the Leninist line of setting up a united anti-imperialist front in the national liberation movement.

The Communist Party of India in our day appeals for implementing such radical socio-economic changes which can, through nationalisation of the monopolies, integration of the numerically predominant small capitalist production and cooperation of peasants, hold back and later stop the country's further capitalist development and direct it along a socialist path.

Not the seizure of leadership of the revolutionary struggle from the very outset, for which Roy called in 1920, but a long and hard struggle for establishing an alliance between the working class, the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie, for advancing the working class as the vanguard force in the process of its revolutionary work in cooperation with other classes and social groups against imperialism, monopolies and reaction, for the country's socio-economic transformation on progressive lines—such is the logic of actual struggle in contrast to an imaginary one. Not an immediate socialist revolution on which Roy oriented the Indian revolutionaries, although there was not yet any organised communist move-

ment in the country, but the formation of a united front of progressive and democratic forces, the establishment of a national-democratic system for which the Communist Party of India is calling today.

Such is the irony of the historical destiny of the untenable political formulations by Roy who attempted to correct Lenin and the Comintern.

Lenin's magnificent teaching, tested by time and verified by struggle, on the tactics of a united front of all anti-imperialist forces in the countries of the East is valid to this day and is an invaluable guide for the Communists of India. Needless to say, the presentation and solution of the problem of a united front of anti-imperialist forces under present conditions differ essentially from those in the 1920s and 1930s, in the period of the emergence and organisational formation of the communist movement. The Communist Party of India, just as the Communist parties of other countries of the East, is handling this problem taking account of its own experience and the characteristic features of our time, in conformity with the radical change in the alignment of forces on the world scene.

As for the left sectarian views of Roy and some of his followers of that time, now such views may be encountered in declarations of various epigones of petty-bourgeois socialism and nationalism.

The life of Indian emigrants in the Soviet Union and the assistance given them by the Soviet government show how the alliance of Soviet Russia with the revolutionary forces of the East took shape. Today this alliance has become global. It expresses the unity of the socialist community with the anti-imperialist forces of Asia, Africa and Latin America, which have received thereby powerful support for their unremitting struggle against imperialism.